

Oriental Bird Club



Bulletin 29 • May 1999



The Oriental Bird Club aims to:

■ encourage an interest
in the birds of the
Oriental Region and
their conservation

■ liaise with and
promote the work of
existing regional
societies

■ collate and publish
material on Oriental
birds

Two bulletins and a journal,
Forktail, are published annually.

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*The partnership that works for bird
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Membership of OBC

Membership of the Club is open to all and for 1999 costs £15 per annum (£10 reduced rate for nationals living in Oriental countries who cannot afford the full rate), £20 Family, £25 Supporting Member (funding one Oriental member in addition to ordinary membership), £25 Libraries and academic institutions, and £45 Business Supporters. Special arrangements for payment exist in USA, Thailand and India. To join or for further details please contact the Membership Secretary, OBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK.

OBC Email Address

mail@orientalbirdclub.org

OBC Web Site

<http://www.orientalbirdclub.org/>

Cover illustration:

A group of Red-billed Blue Magpies *Urocissa erythrorhyncha* mobbing a male Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, drawn from life by Kevin Caley.



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Letter from the Chairman

Nigel Collar

Membership 2000

This is crunch-time for the great OBC ambition: 2,000 members by the year 2000. We have eight months and about 150 members still to go. The membership *is* OBC, so the more we have, the stronger we shall be. This means being able to keep the Bulletin on song, organising great meetings that get people talking, expanding *Forktail* as a major international journal and, most important of all, supporting conservation and the development of ornithology in Asia. So here's my first appeal – everybody think of someone who's currently out of the OBC loop, and *get them to join*. One of the commitments I made to Council in taking on the Chairmanship of OBC was to ensure our publications keep to schedule: if we can achieve this, and if in particular we can keep the flow of money going out to good projects, I hope more and more folk will begin to feel that membership of OBC is both a rewarding experience and a sound investment.

Expenditure £100,000

The second half of 1998 saw the Club spend its 100,000th pound on promoting conservation in Asia. For a group of dedicated birdwatchers who wouldn't fill a supermarket carpark this is a pretty grand milestone. As a conservationist who was not involved at all in the development of the Club I offer my warmest congratulations on a wonderful achievement. Elsewhere in this Bulletin Marcus Kohler, Chairman of the Conservation Committee, tells us about how all that money has been spent – and it is Marcus more than anyone who is pushing the Club to raise more so that we can spend more. In other words – as we all know – there is so much more to be done.

Limits to growth

Many members will have sensed, even those who have never been to an AGM or another OBC event, that a *lot* of work goes on behind the scenes. I have been on Council for a year now, and have discovered at first hand just how much free-time work members of Council put in to keep the Club



Would you eat a curry with this man?

in shape. Their efficiency and dedication are awesome – quite enough to make me feel out of my depth.

But we have a theoretical problem, and several very immediate and practical ones to boot. The theoretical one has to do with our ambitions to grow: how many more members will it take for the current volunteer system to reach carrying capacity? Right now Margaret Sykes, one half of the tireless twin dynamo that administers the Club, serves us as both Membership Secretary *and* Treasurer. We want to make her life a *bit* more difficult and raise 2,000 members, but when do we stop? What are our limits to growth?

Situations vacant

The practical problems we have concern positions on Council that we would like to fill soon. At the 1998 AGM Adrian Pitches retired as our Publicity Officer (best thanks, Adrian), and we are left with

several reshuffling options but also with some clear gaps. We *do* need people to step forward to help out with publicity, with fundraising and with promotions. Moreover, although we have Margaret stepping into Graeme Spinks's shoes as Treasurer (best thanks, Graeme), and although Graeme remains on Council to help out with financial affairs, we would be delighted if any member with professional accounting skills might be willing to join the financial team. In addition, we hope that members with strong business acumen and links might be prepared to join us and give us the benefit of their knowledge and experience. Millionaires are particularly welcome.

We usually hold our meetings in Cambridge, five times a year on a Saturday, so I invite members within a reasonable distance of the city to think if they would like to help out. I can only promise you blood, sweat, toil and tears – the tears, needless to say, being from the vindaloo with which members ritually revive themselves in an expression of unswerving solidarity with the Orient at the end of every meeting. Council is serious stuff, and a lot of fun.

OBC committees

At the AGM I gave a talk about taxonomic problems in Oriental birds, and ended it with the proposal that OBC establish a committee to identify some of the most pressing questions, and to develop ways of resolving them at reasonable speed and with reasonable unanimity. Recently this notion received the formal endorsement of Council, and now I have to develop the idea.

Council has also approved the establishment of a Fundraising Committee. Owing to our current vacuum in this area it may take us some months before we bring this into being. Meanwhile we have a Finance Committee, an Editorial Committee and, of course, a Conservation Committee. If it all smacks of death by bureaucracy, I can only plead that it seems to work; and if it doesn't forebode death by boredom, I might say more about these venerable groupings next time around.

Club News



Forthcoming Meetings for 1999

British Bird Watching Fair

This year the annual Fair will be held from 20th–22nd August. The OBC will have their usual stand and everyone attending is more than welcome to come along and say hello. There will be OBC goods for sale and of course the opportunity to purchase raffle tickets for the Mega Prize Draw. *Forktail 15 is due to be published in August and we ask all members visiting the Fair to call at the stand and pick up their copy.* This year Council member Krys Kazmierczak is giving the talk on an Oriental topic during the daily programme. His talk is entitled "Goa – Gateway to Birding the Orient".

Blakeney OBC Meeting

The usual autumn meeting at Blakeney will take place this year on Sunday 29th August. The programme and list of speakers will be announced later in the year and on the OBC Website (<http://www.orientalbirdclub.org/>). Please put this date in your diary and make every attempt to attend the meeting!

Mega Prize Draw Raffle

With this Bulletin UK members will have received tickets for the Mega Prize Draw Raffle. As last year, this will be the *only* major raffle draw held by the OBC in 1999 and the prizes will be drawn at the Blakeney Meeting on Sunday 29th August. Please try to sell as many of these tickets as you

can and remember that you will not be receiving any further tickets from the OBC this year.

Joint OBC meeting in Sweden with Club 300

As in previous years, the OBC will be holding a joint European meeting. This year an event is scheduled to take place with Club 300 in Sweden, on 2nd October at Öland. This is a migration hot-spot and at this time of year there should be hundreds of migrants and birdwatchers staying on the island. There is also a good chance of seeing some mouth-watering Siberian rarities. Please make every attempt to join the meeting. A superb line-up of speakers has been arranged, including Per Alström on "Oriental warblers", Per Underland on "Birds of Harike, Punjab, India" and Tim Loseby on "Birding in the Western Ghats". Everyone, particularly Scandinavian members and their friends, is welcome to come along and enjoy the event. Several OBC Council members will be attending; please contact The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK or email mail@orientalbirdclub.org if you would like further information on travel arrangements, accommodation etc.

Join the OBC Team!

As you will have read in the Chairman's letter, the Club is in need of willing volunteers to help with publicity, with fundraising and with promotions. Professional experience in these fields is not essential but would be valuable. There is also a need for someone with professional accounting skills to join the financial team. Other roles exist within the editorial team which is responsible for the Club publications. If you are interested in helping with any of these tasks, please contact the Club at The Lodge, Sandy,

Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK or by email: mail@orientalbirdclub.org If you wish to discuss any particular role in more detail, you will be put in touch with the appropriate Council member.

Purchase *The Birds of the Thai-Malay Peninsula* through OBC

Thanks to David Wells, the Club has been approached by Harcourt Brace to offer this long-awaited major work at a discount of £10 to Club members. *The Birds of the Thai-Malay Peninsula. Volume 1: Non-Passerines* by David Wells, and published by Academic Press, is now available. By purchasing the book through the Club you will benefit the conservation fund as well as yourself. The publishers have generously offered the Club an extra discount on all copies sold in this way which will go directly to the fund. Please see the enclosed flier for full details of the book and how to order it.

Club Talks

A reminder that OBC Council members are available to give talks on OBC topics to interested groups. Promotions Officer Richard Eden recently gave one such talk to the Reading RSPB Group and he generously donated his normal speaker's fee to the Club's conservation fund.

Quizbird donation

A special thanks to OBC member Volker Konrad from Germany who was a recent winner of the Quizbird feature in *Birding World*. His prize was for £100 to be sent to the chosen bird charity of his choice — and Volker kindly elected to send the money to the OBC Conservation Fund.

The OBC Conservation Fund: a brief review

OBC's conservation fund has now been running successfully for ten years. In this time 270 proposals have been received and 154 have been offered funding. This is a major achievement which should not be understated, but in planning for the future, it is important that we reflect on the direction and achievements of the fund in its first decade. This paper gives a brief overview of the conservation grants awarded and highlights some of the dilemmas and obstacles that need to be overcome for the fund to continue its important work. It forms part of an ongoing review within OBC Council of both the future direction and financing of the conservation fund.

It is hoped that members will share in the debate and add their support to OBC's conservation efforts: as a Club which celebrates the avifauna of the region, we must all actively contribute to its conservation.

Distribution of grants

Figure 1 shows the distribution of applications and grants. It clearly shows the dominance of India in both grant proposals and awards. This dominance is partly to be expected given the country's strong conservation movement, its relative wealth of ornithologists and its size. The interest shown from India is also in part a tribute to the tireless work of the OBC Indian representatives, Asad Rahmani and Bikram Grewal.

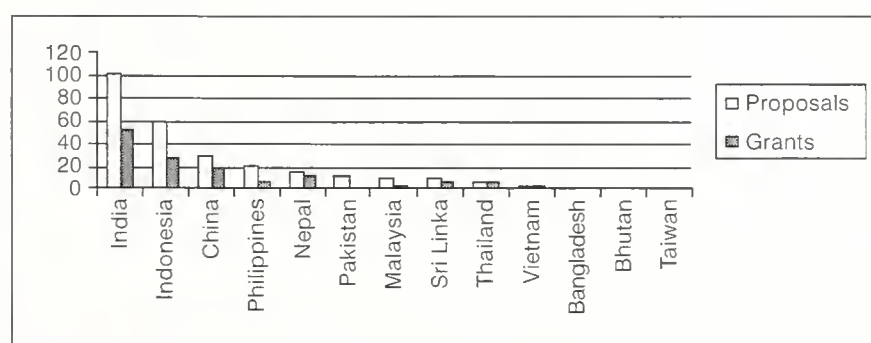


Figure 1: Distribution of OBC Conservation proposals and Awarded grants 1989–1998

Whilst the interest generated from India has been welcomed, it is important to work towards a more balanced distribution of grants across the region. In 1997 OBC expanded its conservation committee, with members taking responsibility

for particular countries (See Bulletin 27: Conservation Fund p.6). As well as dealing with an ever increasing workload, the aim of involving more people was for committee members to encourage applications from within their respective region through close liaison with their respective country representatives. The early signs are that this is working well, with 1998 showing a more even distribution of grant applications from eight different countries — including the first-ever application from Cambodia, which will be reviewed during the next quarter.

Breakdown of projects

Approximately 32% of grants have been awarded to projects on globally threatened species. This has included valuable survey work on several rare Oriental birds, from Gurney's Pitta *Pitta gurneyi* to Relict Gull *Larus relictus*, and Sula Scrubfowl *Megapodius bernsteinii* to White-browed Bushchat *Saxicola macrorhyncha*. There have been several surveys on pheasants, a reflection on the endangered status of members of this family within the Orient, the lack of information available, and possibly their appeal to ornithologists. Several species have been the subject of more than one grant. Ravi Sankaran has been awarded three grants on the Lesser Florican *Eupodotis indica*, developing his projects from status surveys to educational workshops using this critically endangered bird as a flagship species, raising awareness within the local community of the need to conserve grasslands. The 1998 Forktail-Leica award will study the status of Storm's Stork *Ciconia stormi* in the Lower Kinabatangan flood Plains in Sabah, Malaysia and is the second project OBC have awarded on this species.

Approximately 36% of grants have been awarded to projects surveying little known areas, or sites with historical records of globally threatened species. It is important to note that prior to awarding a grant, the conservation committee always secures the comments of the relevant country representative, to offer an unbiased and knowledgeable opinion on the potential value of an area. The role of the country

representatives in this instance is critical, and we are always grateful for their contribution which ensures grants are awarded to the most suitable projects. However, even with these checks, situations in some areas can change rapidly and last year a promising project on Cheer Pheasant *Catreus wallichii* in Dhorportan had to be suspended due to Maoist terrorist activity in the region.

Approximately 18% of grants have been awarded to conservation awareness projects. These have ranged from wildlife camps for children to working with the local community in buffer zones of national parks. Conservation awareness projects can be inventive and effective, such as the Philippine "Travelling Eco-exhibit" built last year with OBC funding to tour local villages in the Tayabas region, raising awareness of the importance of the region's wildlife. The annual OBC-WildWings Conservation Awareness Award enables large projects to be funded which tend to provide a more thorough conservation awareness package. However, it is more difficult to judge a small grant application that is concerned with conservation awareness.

There is a great debate as to whether small-scale awareness projects are effective. It is my personal belief that a good conservation awareness project offers the most effective use of OBC's funds, as it is crucial to get the conservation message across to as wide an audience as possible in a region which still has only a small percentage

of people aware of the natural wonders and fragility of their immediate environment. Witness, for example, the project featured in Bulletin 28 where an OBC grant enabled a group of schoolchildren in north-east Thailand to study, sketch and paint the birds in Pa Son Nogku Provincial Park, then display their paintings in the local community centre. It clearly demonstrated how the children had discovered the fascinating world of natural history.

However, a number of awareness projects have provided little feedback in terms of reports. As these offer the best yardstick by which the conservation committee can judge a project, there is always an element of doubt in awarding small grants to conservation awareness projects. Ultimately, they are dependent on people who have the ability to inspire others, a quality that is very difficult to judge on a grant application form.

The remaining 14% of grants have been awarded to projects researching deforestation, investigating the wild bird trade or to fund the publishing of bird books and other publications in the region.

Funding

It may surprise members to discover that none of their subscription money is used for OBC's conservation fund. In fact the subscription only covers the cost of the two Bulletins and *Forktail*: The £6,000–£10,000 raised each year for the

Table 1: Corporate Sponsors' support of OBC Conservation Grants

Corporate Sponsor	No of grants	Notes
Leica Camera	10	10 years support of Forktail award
WildWings	7	5 years support of OBC/WW award and 2 small grants
Per Underland	4	4 small grants
Birdquest	3	3 small grants
Emirates NHG	3	3 small grants
Avifauna	2	2 small grants
Cygnus	2	2 small grants
Kingfisher	2	2 small grants
Ornitholidays	2	2 small grants
Limosa	1	1 small grant of £750 for work on Green-billed Coucal
Sunbird	1	1 small grant and an additional donation
In Focus	1	supported conservation awareness award in 1993
Club 300	1	1 small grant
Murphy's Wildlife	1	1 small grant
Naturetrek	1	1 small grant
New South Wales FOC	1	1 small grant of £200

conservation fund comes largely through our Corporate Sponsors, OBC sales and, of course, the annual raffle.

OBC Corporate Sponsors have now supported 42 projects (Table 1). Leica Camera and WildWings have led the way, with ten and seven projects respectively. Several bird tour operators have also shown their conservation commitment: Birdquest recently sponsored their third project, Avifauna announces their support of two projects in this Bulletin and sponsorship has also been forthcoming recently from Kingfisher Tours for two projects in China. Ornitholidays supported two projects and Cygnus, Kingfisher Tours, Limosa, Murphy's Wildlife, Naturetrek and Sunbird tour operators have all supported projects in the past. Donations have also been forthcoming from The Emirates Natural History Group with funding for three grants, Club 300 in Sweden and the New South Wales Field Ornithologists Club in Australia. Companies such as NHBS, Nikon UK, and Leica Camera (again), have also consistently offered prizes for our annual raffle which remains a critical source of income. NHBS are, in addition, now supplying free field guides to projects that require them.

However, the conservation fund has reached a threshold and we must ensure that we can continue to raise sufficient money to continue our work. Funds have been raised in the last two years by the sale of the "Annotated Checklist of the birds of the Oriental Region", but for this year, and the foreseeable future, there is no such obvious breadwinner. The welcome development of other regional bird clubs brings with it other conservation funds — all equally in need of money and all largely turning to the same sources to buy raffle tickets and to sponsor grants. This inevitably means that our raffles, although still an essential source of funds, have experienced a steady decline in income this was a pivotal reason in changing last year to holding just one large raffle a year rather than maintaining two). OBC Council is considering several options in order to boost funding, *but what is immediately apparent is that we need a bigger pool of active members to assist putting fundraising ideas into action and in running the Club.* Should any member feel they can help, they are more than welcome to get in touch. Please help to ensure that the second decade of the OBC conservation fund is as successful as the first.

Marcus Kohler, OBC Conservation Officer, email: Marcus@mjkohler.demon.co.uk, tel. +44 (0) 1223 501929



Conservation Fund

Compiled by Marcus Kohler with additional contributions from Anny Andaryati, Phil Benstead, Andy Clements, Mike Crosby and Carol Inskipp.

CORPORATE SPONSORS

We are indebted to our corporate sponsors who time and time again support the OBC Conservation Fund and enable us to fund so many worthwhile projects. As well as the continued support from WildWings and Leica Cameras, Avifauna have agreed to fund two new projects and details of book donations are given below.

Book donations

A & C Black publishers have generously offered to donate five copies of *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent* by Richard Grimmett and Carol and Tim Inskipp for distribution to applicants for conservation grants and suitable organisations within the region.

Copies of this book will be sent to Bird Conservation Nepal and the Royal Society for Nature Conservation in Bhutan and will be essential assets to their respective libraries. Further donations will be announced in the next Bulletin.



The Natural History Book Service

The Natural History Book Service (NHBS) continues to support the OBC Conservation Fund with an annual donation of up to £500 worth of books to assist successful applicants with appropriate field guides. A copy of *Expedition Field Techniques: Bird Surveys* is to be sent to Dr Jamil Urfi to assist with his Bird Study Introductory Manual announced in Bulletin 27. Other books donated by NHBS are mentioned under the appropriate project.

GRANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Thirty new proposals have been reviewed since the last Bulletin. We are delighted to announce the two major awards for 1998. The 1998 Forktail-Leica Award goes to a proposal from East Malaysia, and the 1998 OBC-WildWings Conservation Awareness Award goes to a project from Nepal.

In addition, six small grants have been awarded: two to conservation awareness projects in Indonesia and four to surveys of remote areas, two in India and two in China.

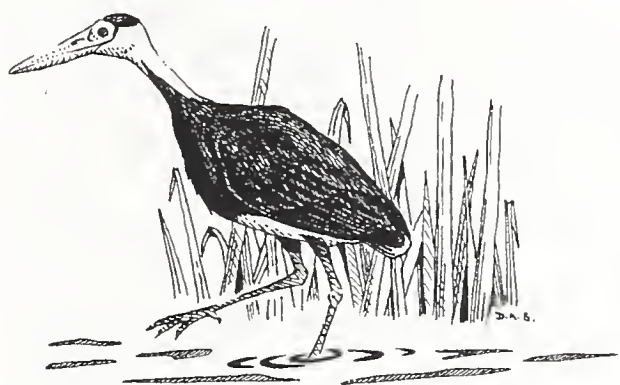
**Survey of Storm's Stork
Ciconia stormi in the Lower
Kinabatangan flood plain,
Sabah, East Malaysia**

1998 Forktail-Leica Award

Zainal Ja'afar's proposal to survey the population and habitat requirements of Storm's Stork *Ciconia stormi* within the Lower Kinabatangan flood plain, one of fifteen projects to be considered for this award, won the 1998 Forktail-Leica Award of £1000.



LEICA



Storm's Stork *Ciconia stormi* by
Dave Showler

Avifauna conservation awareness programme in the south-western buffer zone of the Royal Bardia National Park, Nepal



The Lower Kinabatangan is the largest forest-covered alluvial flood plain in Malaysia, located in the north-east of Sabah. It contains some of the last remaining examples of freshwater swamp forests and lakes in South-East Asia. However, although partially protected, large areas of swamp and riverine forest are being cleared for oil palm plantations.

The project aims to gather information on the population and possible breeding status of the globally threatened Storm's Stork. The survey results should assist in the conservation of unprotected areas within the flood plain. Copies of *Expedition Field Techniques: Bird Surveys* and *Birds of Borneo, Sumatra, Java and Bali*, donated by NHBS, are to be sent to Zainal Ja'afar.

For the tenth year running we thank Leica Cameras for their continued support of the OBC Conservation Fund's major award.

1998 OBC-WildWings Conservation Awareness Award

We are grateful for the continued support of the birders' travel agency *WildWings* for sponsoring their fifth WildWings Conservation Awareness Award. In 1998 this was given to Shant Raj Jnawali and Chiranjibi Pokheral working with the Bardia Conservation Program in the south-western lowlands of Nepal. Royal Bardia National Park is important for a number of endangered lowland grassland species including Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* and Bengal Florican *Eupodotis bengalensis*. The proposal is targeted at raising awareness of bird conservation issues in the buffer zone around the park, where high density human settlements see nature conservation only as a luxury, remote from their day-to-day lives. In addition the target group is often responsible for habitat clearance and illegal trapping of birds, which has a detrimental affect on the positive conservation work in the park.

The project aims to use four main techniques, directed at different groups among the population.

- 1 An avifauna centre providing information on the local endangered species, habitats and on basic birdwatching techniques will be set up at the park headquarters. Material will be presented in both Nepali and English and the centre will be open to local communities and visiting school groups as well as tourists.
- 2 School children will be encouraged to attend bird observation camps. Birdwatching techniques and conservation issues will be taught at these, and the marking of a permanent birdwatching trail through the park will be an output.
- 3 Workshops will be organised for local leaders, farmers and teachers in the main areas of the buffer zone, to raise motivation towards action for conservation.
- 4 Finally local young adults, *Tharu*, will be trained to become wildlife guides, servicing the increasing volume of eco-tourism to the park.

The project should result in a much wider understanding of, and support for, bird conservation issues amongst different sectors of the local population. The applicants are to receive a copy of *A Pictorial Guide to Birds of the Indian Subcontinent* donated by NHBS.

Environmental awareness for Bandung communities: the garden birds approach

OBC has awarded a small grant to this project which intends to raise community awareness through bird surveys, leaflets, guided walks and interpretation boards in four public gardens in Bandung, Java, Indonesia.

The project is organised by Yayasan Pribumi Alam Lestari, an indigenous NGO based in Bandung. The group aims to collect information on the diversity and distribution of birds in these public gardens and to produce information boards for raising awareness about the species found. They will also distribute leaflets and stickers and organise Sunday birding activities. The aim is to target the general public with particular emphasis on young people, in the hope that more people will be encouraged to enjoy and appreciate their native birds. Copies of *Birds of Borneo, Sumatra, Java and Bali* and of *Expedition Field Techniques: Bird Surveys*, are being donated by NHBS.

Kabar Burung, Java, Indonesia

Kabar Burung is a quarterly Bulletin published by Kutilang Indonesia Bird Watching Club in Yogyakarta, Java, for distributing information on the conservation of birds in Indonesia. OBC have awarded the project a small grant of £500 to produce bulletins for 1999 whilst a long-term sponsor is sought. The newsletter is distributed to schools, universities, government agencies and other NGOs and has been well received within the local community, with articles on both national and international conservation issues, new records for the region and local birdwatching sites.

Survey of pheasant populations in Kuankuoshui Nature Reserve, Guizhou, China

We are indebted to Avifauna for supporting this project with a grant of £500.

Kuankuoshui Nature Reserve is one of the most important sites for bird conservation in Guizhou Province, and was established for the protection of Golden Pheasant *Chrysolophus pictus*, the threatened Reeves's Pheasant *Syrnaticus reevesii* and other species following intensive studies by the late Professor Wu Zhikang and colleagues in the 1980s. During the 1990s, there have been considerable environmental changes around the reserve, which is now an isolated block of about 24.5 km² of forest surrounded by tea plantations and farmland. Liang Wei has been awarded a small grant of £500 to determine the current population status of the four pheasant species which occur in the reserve. The project also plans to help reserve staff to develop a long-term monitoring programme, and raise awareness of conservation issues amongst staff, local people and local and provincial government. A copy of *Expedition Field Techniques: Bird Surveys* donated by NHBS is to be sent to Liang Wei.

Black-faced Spoonbills *Platalea minor* at Dalai Hu, Inner Mongolia, China

We are indebted to Avifauna for supporting this project with a grant of £500.

Dalai Hu, at 3,525 km², is one of China's largest wetland reserves, with extensive marshes and reedbeds that support populations of many waterbirds, including the threatened Oriental Stork *Ciconia boyciana*. A group of six probable Black-faced Spoonbills



Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor*
by Kevin Caley

Pheasants as indicators of biodiversity in Chamba, Himachal Pradesh, India

Platalea minor was photographed there in spring 1998, and large numbers of hooded gulls which pass through in spring could be either Relict *Larus relictus* or Saunders's Gull *L. saundersi*. A team led by Liu Song Tao, one of the reserve's staff, has been awarded a small grant for surveys of the area during spring 1999. This will improve knowledge of breeding and migratory waterbirds present, particularly in parts of the reserve which have not previously been studied, and will provide further data on the status of Black-faced Spoonbills at the reserve. A copy of *Birds of Hong Kong and Southern China* and of *Expedition Field Techniques: Bird Surveys* donated by NHBS are being sent to aid the project.

A small grant of £500 has been awarded to a team of Indian ornithologists led by Rahul Kaul to survey montane areas for birds, large mammals and plants in Chamba district, part of the Western Himalayas Endemic Bird Area (EBA). The project hopes to assess the relationships between Galliformes and other plant and animal groups and examine their value as indicators of biodiversity. Additionally the areas surveyed are, in many cases, contiguous with existing protected areas and the results will facilitate the planning of a protected areas network for the region. Species present include the globally threatened Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus* and Cheer Pheasant *Catreus wallichii*. A copy of *Expedition Field Techniques: Bird Surveys* donated by NHBS is being sent to aid the project.

CONSERVATION FUND IN ACTION

OBC has received six reports since Bulletin 28 detailing the results of two important surveys in India, an important wetland survey in Sri Lanka, a study of Bengal Floricans in Nepal, a search for Relict Gulls in China and a unique conservation awareness project in the Philippines.

Nesting success of the Swamp Francolin *Francolinus gularis* in northern India

A small grant of £500 enabled a team of ornithologists to study the nesting success of the Swamp Francolin *Francolinus gularis* in Northern India. The species is under severe risk of extinction because of drainage and conversion of wet grasslands into agricultural land, and a major obstacle to understanding its habitat needs and the impact of land-use changes has been the difficulty of collecting information in the wild. A preliminary study in 1993 found that calling birds could be detected at dawn and dusk from February to April and they were often recorded from sugarcane fields. Subsequently 12 birds were radio-tracked to document their use of habitat during the breeding period.

Only one nest had been documented prior to this study but radio-tagging allowed six to be located. Of these, two were in grassland, three in disused and overgrown sugarcane fields and one in a current sugarcane crop. Only two of the six nests in the study fledged young, one from the grassland and one from the disused sugarcane field. Three of the nests failed as a result of

A faunal survey of Namdapha Tiger Reserve, Arunachal Pradesh, India



White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata* by Jan Wilczur

human interference. The results suggest that although birds are often heard calling from sugarcane fields, this habitat is of negligible use for breeding, and Swamp Francolin populations will require access to other, undisturbed habitats in order to remain viable.

Rerwez Iquball and Phil McGowan

A small grant of £500 helped fund a seven-week faunal survey of the Namdapha Tiger Reserve in south-eastern Arunachal Pradesh. The extensive wilderness areas of Arunachal Pradesh support the richest assemblage of flora and fauna in India and are a noted biodiversity hotspot. Although human population levels in this region are still relatively low, increasingly pressures from the timber industry and shifting cultivation are being felt. This survey helped identify areas of high diversity and endemism that can be effectively protected.

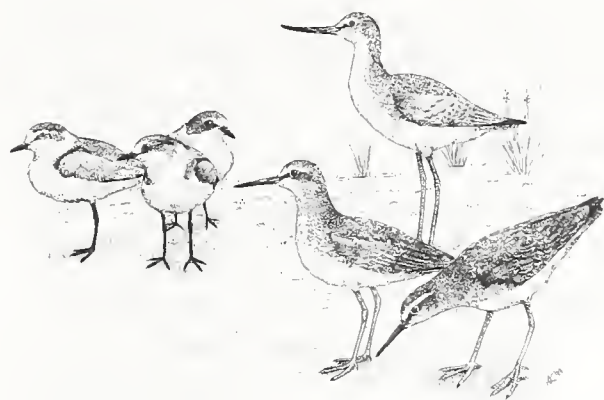
Namdapha Tiger Reserve covers 2,162 km² and covers an incredible altitudinal range from the bleached floodplain of the river Noa Dihing at less than 300 m to the snow-clad slopes of Dapha Bum at 4,571 m. Vegetation is varied, with tropical wet evergreen and semi-evergreen forest at low elevations, to temperate broadleaved and coniferous forests and alpine meadows at higher altitudes.

The survey visited locations between 260 and 1,280 m, recording over 230 species of bird including the following species of conservation concern: White-cheeked Partridge *Arborophila atrogularis*, White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*, Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*, Blyth's Kingfisher *Alcedo hercules*, White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Pied Falconet *Microhierax melanoleucos*, White-bellied Heron *Ardea insignis*, Blue-naped Pitta *Pitta nipalensis*, Rusty-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx hypertythra*, Rufous-breasted Bush Robin *Tarsiger hypertythrus*, Blue-fronted Robin *Cinclidium frontale*, Green Cochoa *Cochoa viridis*, Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa*, Wedge-billed Wren Babbler *Sphenocichla humei*, Snowy-throated Babbler *Stachyris oglei*, Yellow-throated Fulvetta *Alcippe cinerea*, Rufous-throated Fulvetta *Alcippe rufogularis*, Lesser Rufous-headed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis atosuperciliaris* and Greater Rufous-headed Parrotbill *Paradoxornis ruficeps*. The report concludes with an annotated checklist of the birds of Namdapha, drawing on records from a variety of sources. Additionally 20 species of snake and 83 species of butterfly were recorded during the survey.

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Bird diversity at Kiralakele wetland, Sri Lanka

OBC provided a small grant of £200 and four pairs of used binoculars, generously supplied by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), for a study of bird diversity at Kiralakele, Sri Lanka, to collect basic data on the wetland's bird life.



A mixed group of Kentish Plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* and a Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* by Kevin Caley

The government-owned marsh, one of two in Matara district, covers 300 ha and is situated on the south coast of Sri Lanka. The wetland is easily accessible and is close to the town of Matara where more than 2,000 students attend school. The area therefore has excellent potential for conservation education, scientific research and eco-tourism. However, the ecological importance of this wetland has never previously been studied and no conservation programme has been carried out at this valuable site. This survey indicated that it is an important feeding and breeding site for large numbers of resident and migratory waterbirds.

At present only a few farmers cultivate paddyfields in the study area, some of whom use the marsh for rearing buffaloes while the canals and marsh are used for fishing. The study was carried out from 1996 to 1998 and bird counts were made at fortnightly intervals.

A total of 98 bird species was observed, including 48 waterfowl species and 23 breeding species including three large nesting colonies of herons, egrets and cormorants. Resident species included Openbill Stork *Anastomus oscitans*, Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*, White Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*, Black Bittern *Dupetor flavicollis* and Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*. The numbers of birds varied throughout the year, depending on weather conditions and possibly also on food availability. The largest numbers were observed during the early part of the year and a large flock of 90–100 Painted Storks, 40–50 White Ibises and egrets visited the marsh daily during February and March. At this time of the year most of the marsh was dry except for a few shallow pools. An influx of migratory waterbirds was recorded during August to September. Large mixed flocks of migrants including Kentish Plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Wood Sandpipers *Tringa glareola* and Greenshanks *Tringa nebularia* were observed in the first week of August, feeding in paddyfields which were being prepared for sowing. These migrants left the site within 10–14 days of their arrival. A few terrestrial migrants such as Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus*, Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* and Pied Harrier *C. melanoleucos* were also recorded. The number of Purple Gallinules *Porphyrio porphyrio* fell from about 212 birds in 1996 to 162 in 1998, mainly because of habitat destruction and killing of the birds for meat by poachers.

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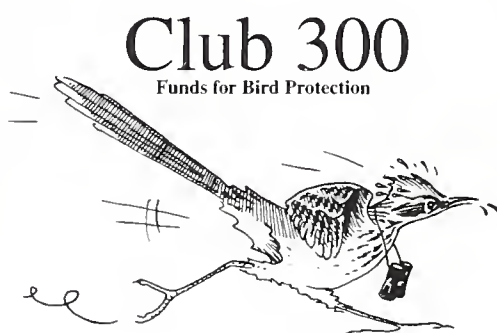
Status of Bengal Florican *Eupodotis bengalensis* in Royal Bardia National Park, western lowland Nepal

A small grant supported a three-month study of the population of Bengal Floricans *Eupodotis bengalensis* in three phantas (open grasslands) of the south-western section of Royal Bardia National Park. The project assessed factors which disturb these sensitive birds, such as tourist vehicles approaching too closely for sightings and photography, stray domestic dogs, illegal collection of park resources by local people and illegal grazing of cattle. Nine individuals were studied during spring 1998, five adult males and

four females. Recommendations include scrub control and grassland management to ensure the conservation of phantas, the stopping of illegal activities, and a conservation awareness programme amongst local people and visitors. The last of these recommendations will be taken forward through the 1998 OBC-WildWings Conservation Award.

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Relict Gull *Larus relictus* survey in Inner Mongolia, China



The Relict Gull *Larus relictus* was described from a specimen collected in 1929 at Tsondol on the Ruoshuihe River, in northern Inner Mongolia, close to the border between China and Mongolia. A grant of £500, kindly donated by Club 300, funded a survey of the Juyanhai wetlands, which include the marshes surrounding the Gaxun Nur, Sogun Nur and the type locality of Relict Gull on the lower reaches of the Ruoshuihe River in the Gobi Desert. Xing Lianlian, Yang Guisheng and Shang Shiyong made three survey visits to the area between April and August 1998.

They found that the condition of the Juyanhai wetlands has changed dramatically in recent years. Historical evidence suggests that 3,000 years ago the wetlands had an area of c. 800 km², and in the early 1950s they still covered 302 km². However, mainly as a result of the diversion of the middle reaches of the Ruoshuihe River to supply numerous reservoirs and to irrigate farmland, the area of open water declined to 60 km² in 1972, only 23.6 km² in the early 1980s and a tiny area in the 1990s. By the time of this survey, the lakes had completely dried up.

Despite the lack of suitable habitat for Relict Gulls, the survey team found a total of 50 bird species, including 12 resident breeding species, 22 summer visitors and 16 passage migrants. Most of the survey site comprised gravel desert and rocky outcrops where they only recorded six species, the dominant birds being Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana* and Henderson's Ground Jay *Podoces hendersoni*. A particularly interesting record in this habitat was of Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata*, well to the east of the range mapped for this species by Cheng Tso-hsin (1987). Areas of poplar and tamarisk along the banks of the Ruoshuihe River and around oases supported a higher diversity of birds, including Saxaul Sparrow *Passer ammodendri* and a range of migrants. A small reservoir, almost dried up in summer, supported a variety of waterbirds, including Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* and several species of ducks and shorebirds.

The rapid decrease in the flow of the Ruoshuihe River has had a dramatic effect on both the Juyanhai wetlands and the poplar and tamarisk woodlands. Large areas of woodland have died through lack of water, and the total area of woodland is estimated to have declined from 250,000 ha in 1944 to 88,400 ha in 1994. It is proposed that the National Ministry of Water Conservation should work with the governments of Gansu Province and Inner Mongolia to restore the flow of the Ruoshuihe River to its former

volume. If this is not done, the habitat of Relict Gull in the Juyanhai wetlands and the associated woodlands could be lost forever.

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The Tayabas travelling eco-exhibit, Philippines

In May 1998 the Tayabas Mountaineers, a community-based environmental NGO, were awarded a small grant of £750 to set up a travelling eco-exhibit and train volunteers in the production and dissemination of education materials.

The project aimed to enhance the awareness of people in local schools and communities about the importance of conserving the habitats and wildlife in Tayabas tropical forests. The project was co-ordinated by Rolando Redor, and the Tayabas Mountaineers involved the Local Development Council of Tayabas and the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS Region IV-A).

The eco-exhibit comprised 20 display panels and a range of other conservation education reference material. The display panels were made from sustainably produced local materials like bamboo, rattan, lukmoy vines and banig palm mats. The Tayabas mountaineers made bamboo panel frames and used rings of split rattan as end binders for each pole. Fresh buri palms were woven by local women to serve as matting for the photo displays in the exhibit.

The photos displayed illustrated a range of habitats and wildlife, including endemic birds such as the globally threatened Luzon Scops Owl *Otus longicornis*, and the near-threatened Philippine Rufous Hornbill *Buceros hydrocorax*, Blue-breasted Flycatcher *Cyornis herioti*, Luzon Bleeding-heart *Gallicolumba luzonica* and Spotted Buttonquail *Turnix ocellata*.

To maximise the potential of the travelling eco-exhibit, a number of trained and knowledgeable volunteer co-ordinators were needed to help disseminate the information. Consequently, an important part of the project involved setting up a two-day training workshop. Sixteen local volunteers attended the workshop from a broad range of disciplines including teachers, government employees, craftspeople, a nurse and a comic writer. Over the two days volunteers were shown how to design and produce educational materials like display panels, and attended a series of lectures including topics such as biodiversity conservation, communication and designing and managing a training programme. The eco-exhibit could potentially be used within the community's 66 barangays, schools, governmental and parish-based locations. Through the Tayabas Mountaineers and voluntary co-ordinators it is anticipated that the information produced promoting biodiversity conservation will be disseminated widely throughout the communities of Tayabas.

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Around the Orient

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

CHINA

Long-billed Wren Babbler added to Chinese list

Long-billed Wren Babbler *Rimator malacoptilus* has been added to the Chinese list after two were netted in the Gaoligong Shan mountains in the south-western province of Yunnan, near the Burmese border. Chinese ornithologist Han Lianxian caught the birds in autumn 1990 in Gongshan county at an elevation of 2,100 metres. He at first mistook them for juvenile Slender-billed Scimitar Babblers *Xiphirhynchus superciliaris*, which he captured in the same area a few weeks earlier and which were the first record in China since 1926 (*Forktail* 11: 168-9). But further research confirmed them as Long-billed Wren Babbler, listed in *Birds to Watch 2* as near-threatened.

Source: *China Nature* 1998.6

Spot-bellied Eagle Owl discovered in Chinese zoo

Chinese ornithologist Han Lianxian was surprised to discover a captive Spot-bellied Eagle Owl *Bubo nipalensis* in a zoo in Simao in the Xishuangbanna region of Yunnan province in February 1998. The bird had been captured in the wild and was the first Chinese record since 1954, when a specimen was taken in Hekou county in Yunnan. Han was told the owl was sold to the zoo by a farmer who had caught it in

mountains 28 km away, and that four or five birds of this species had been confiscated in the last few years during a survey of wildlife in the area. Han says this indicates that there is a "fairly stable" population in the Simao area of Spot-bellied Eagle Owl, a species listed as near-threatened in *Birds to Watch 2*.

Source: *China Nature* 1998.6

New Saunders's Gull breeding site found in north-east China

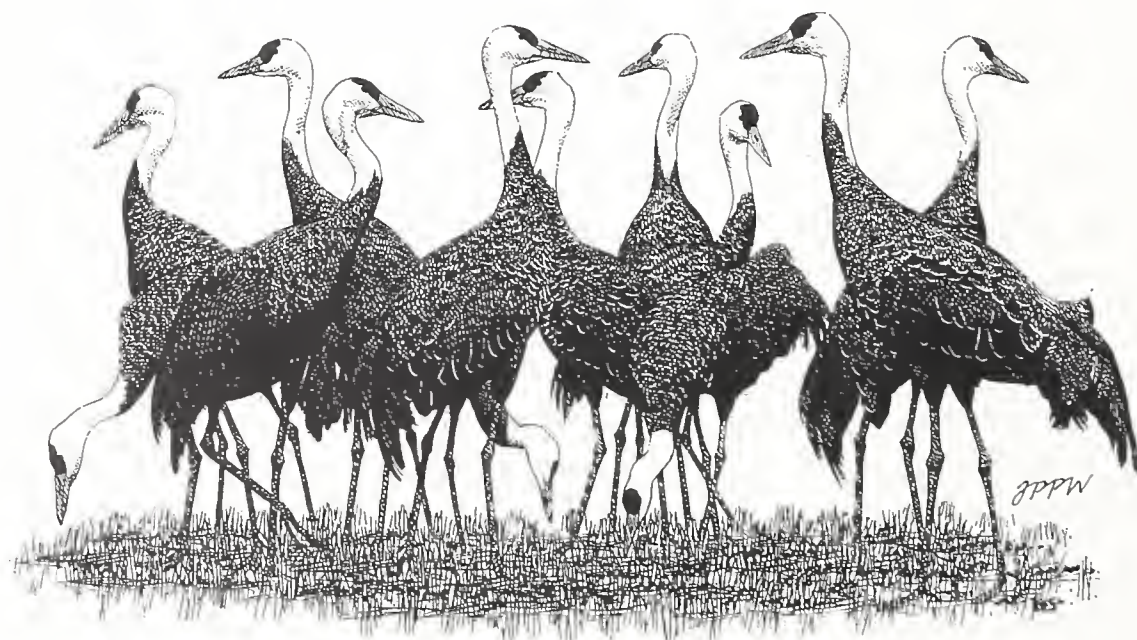
A new breeding site for Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi* has been discovered in Liaoning province in north-east China. Seven nests containing 17 eggs were found at Donggang on the Yellow Sea in June 1998. Most of the nests were built on dykes protecting shrimp ponds and 38 Saunders's Gulls were seen flying above the nests. The dykes were about two metres high and one metre wide on top and the nests were as little as two metres apart.

Surprisingly, the gulls were not seen to feed in the shrimp ponds. Saunders's Gull is listed as globally threatened in *Birds to Watch 2*, which estimates the world population at 3,000. However, recent counts suggest the world population could be almost double this figure: the species is now known to breed in South Korea, the first reported nesting outside China (OBC Bulletin 28: 43).

Source: *China Nature* 1998.6

Hooded Crane population found in Inner Mongolia

A flock of nearly 50 Hooded Cranes *Grus monacha* has been discovered in Inner Mongolia, the largest summer population recorded in China. On 23rd June 1998 a total of 47 Hooded Cranes was seen in three groups at Hulieyetu in the Hulun Buir area, 120 km north-west of Hailar near the Sino-Russian border, and from 25-30th June groups of 24, 22 and 11 were seen. The flock included five to eight sub-



Hooded Cranes *Grus monacha* by Jan Wilczur

adults, but there was no evidence of breeding.

Ornithologist Li Xiaomin was told by local herdsmen that the birds arrived in late May, and this was the first time they had seen Hooded Cranes in the area. The only other record of summering Hooded Cranes in China was in Heilongjiang province, where breeding has been proved (OBC Bulletin 18).

Source: *China Nature* 1998.6

Oriental Storks discovered in Tianjin

Beijing University students have discovered a substantial wintering population of Oriental Storks *Ciconia boyciana* in Tianjin. They logged 800 birds in the flock at Beidagang Reservoir on 8–9th March 1999. This represents a significant percentage of the world population of this globally threatened species. The storks were recorded by students working for the Tianjin Wetland and Waterbirds Conservation Project which is funded by the BP/BirdLife Conservation Programme and the International Crane Foundation. Researchers are logging all the waterbirds in the area and the full survey results are expected in the summer. Visiting birders interested in the Tianjin sites should contact Zhang Zhengwang at Beijing Normal University by email. The address is: zzw@bnu.edu.cn.

Source: Zhang Zhengwang

Cranes face China crisis

Severe flooding in south-east China in the summer of 1998 has killed off most of the eel-grass growing in the Poyang Nature Reserve, Jiangxi province. This is very bad

news for the wintering population of Siberian Cranes *Grus leucogeranus* as eel-grass is an important food source for the 3,000-strong flock which frequents the Poyang lakes. These birds, which breed in north-east Siberia, represent 98% of the world population. With eel-grass growing in only one of the nine Poyang lakes in winter 1998/99, Chinese conservationists have feared an exodus of cranes onto surrounding farmland where impoverished farmers have resorted to hunting the birds for food and trade.

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, Feb 1999

Saker smugglers target western China

Poaching of Saker Falcons *Falco cherrug* has been recorded in Xinjiang since the early 1990s. The poachers are mainly from Pakistan and Arab countries. Several hundred Sakers are now confiscated by Chinese customs officers every year with 90 being discovered in Xinjiang between September and November 1998. But these birds are clearly just a small fraction of those taken from the wild — many more poachers must be evading border controls and smuggling the Sakers out of China to falconers elsewhere in western Asia. Several hundred Pakistani poachers and traffickers are believed to be active in Xinjiang. One correspondent once found 150 Pakistanis catching falcons at Bayanbulak Nature Reserve. And the poachers are now expanding their territories beyond Xinjiang into Tibet, Qinghai, Gansu and Ningxia.

Source: Ma Ming, Xinjiang Institute of Biology, Academia Sinica, China

INDIA

Siberian Cranes head north — for the last time?

On 28th February 1999 the two adult Siberian White Cranes *Grus leucogeranus* which had been wintering at Keoladeo National Park, Rajasthan, headed north on their perilous journey through the Himalayas to western Siberia. We wait and hope that they will return in the autumn: could this be the last time the species is seen in India?

Source: Hans Christophersen, EuroBirdnet

P&O pull out of super-port plan

The British-based multinational shipping and transport company P & O has decided not to proceed with the development of a “super-port” on an environmentally sensitive stretch of the Indian west coast in Dahanu (See OBC Bulletin 26: 17). The proposed port and industrial area would have been eight times the size of Liverpool docks in the UK. The decision to pull out follows a campaign by local people and WWF. It was viewed as a test case for multinationals’ observance of local laws and followed the local environmental protection authority’s statement that the project would be “wholly impermissible.” P & O’s own consultants said the super-port would cause “irrevocable environmental damage.”

Source: *BBC Wildlife*, Jan 1999

Catastrophic floods at Kaziranga

The worst monsoon floods in living memory inundated Kaziranga National Park in

Assam in 1998. The water reached the previous peak of 1988's floods but then stayed at that level for three months. The park is home to 1,200 Asian One-horned Rhinoceros, 70% of the world population, besides globally important populations of large waterbirds like the Greater Adjutant *Leptoptilos dubius*. The floodwaters have swamped the rhinos' grazing land — and local farmers' fields. Starving rhinos, deer and elephants have been forced to head south out of the park into the populated region across the Assam-Burmese Highway. And poachers have headed into the park, sparking gun battles with the park's dedicated wardens. The park authorities face a £250,000 bill to repair damaged camps, roads and bridges. The Indian government has offered a third of the cost. At least 35 rhinos drowned in the floods. Many more would have perished if park wardens had not had the foresight to raise man-made hillocks as dry-land havens before the floods arrived. The tragedy for local villagers is that they could not plant out their rice crop in the inundated fields in September and food is now very scarce. Meanwhile, the Assamese State Forests Minister has opened the Nameri National Park near Tezpur and declared it would soon be as famous as Kaziranga. Nameri is home to more than 310 bird species, including an estimated 50 White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*. It is also home to about 30 tigers. Forests Minister Nagen Sharma said many international organisations had helped Nameri National Park including WWF-India which

donated 15 wireless sets and a mini-truck for the park rangers.

Sources: *BBC Wildlife*, Nov 1998; *The North East Times* 16.11.98

INDONESIA

Wildlife suffers as economic crisis continues

The fall of Suharto and the continuing economic crisis in Indonesia have allowed environmental crime to flourish. Illegal logging in southern Borneo is now proceeding at breakneck speed in the peat swamp forests of Kalimantan which are home to a quarter of the world's remaining orangutan besides a host of Bornean endemic birds. The forests cover an area the size of Wales and are flooded for nine months of the year. A major threat to them was posed in 1996 by then-President Suharto's plan to turn a million hectares of swamp into rice paddy. This idea was shelved when Suharto fell, but along with him went his cronies who controlled logging in Kalimantan. In the resulting vacuum there is now a free-for-all and tens of thousands of illegal loggers are using the irrigation canals dug for the rice paddy project to enter the forest and float the logs out. As the peat forest is depleted, there is a risk that some of the approximately 100 billion tonnes of carbon stored in the peat could be released into the atmosphere. The global warming potential is huge — that amount of carbon is equivalent to 18 years worth of the world's total emissions from burning fossil fuels.

Indonesian rupiah banknotes proudly sport images of the orangutan, the Komodo dragon and a species of bird-of-paradise — three of the nation's 546 protected species, and trade in these protected animals is flourishing in Jakarta where, ironically, it is the ailing rupiah that is driving this illegal trade. "All over Indonesia we have messages the trade is increasing. With the economic crisis, people are taking risks and going for whatever can bring them in some money," said Willy Smits, who heads a Department of Forestry scheme to stop the illegal wildlife trade. Many farmers facing poverty after the fall of the rupiah are turning to poaching to make a living. Much of the trade involves smuggling by boat between Indonesia's myriad islands, and senior military officials have been implicated in the illegal trade. One helicopter raid on an army camp in Kalimantan last year freed a number of caged orangutans. A senior military official in Way Kambas, south Sumatra, was recently arrested for hunting tigers and selling their skins at five million rupiah each. The wildlife trade extends beyond Indonesia into the Far East, Europe and North America.

Sources: *BBC Wildlife*, March 1999; *South China Morning Post* 18.1.99

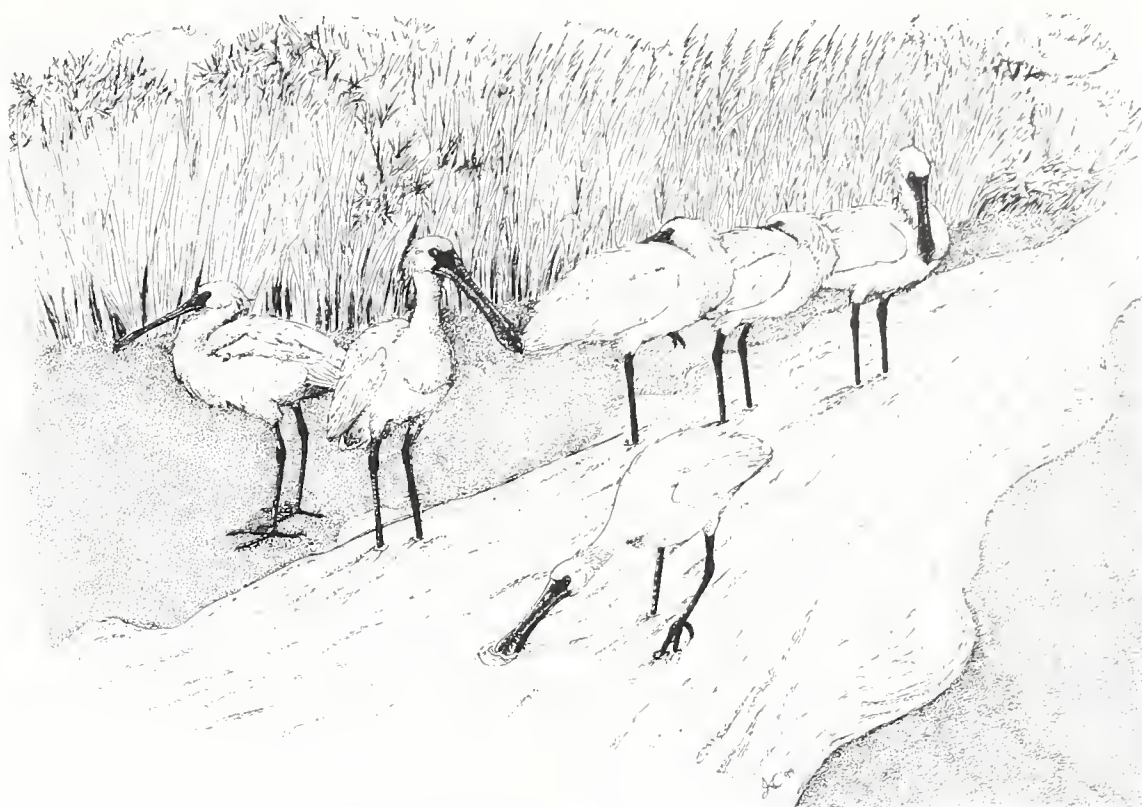
NORTH KOREA

Conservation still a priority

Despite the collapse of the economy in North Korea and the starvation facing many of its people, nature conservation is still a priority. A story filed

by the state news agency in January 1999 highlighted conservation efforts at two reserves — Cholwon in central North Korea and the Kumya reserve on the coast. At Cholwon 3,000 ha have been set aside as a “colony of national nature preservation” because of its population of Red-crowned Cranes *Grus japonensis*. And apparently 70 bird species migrated to the Kumya waterbird reserve.

Source: KCNA monitored by BBC Monitoring



Black-faced Spoonbills *Platalea minor* by Kevin Caley

SOUTH KOREA

Reclamation project will destroy South Korea's foremost wetland

The Yellow Sea between the Chinese mainland on the west and north and the Korean Peninsula on the east is one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world. The tidal mudflats are particularly severely endangered by reclamation. Of the current reclamation schemes, one clearly stands out as the most critical. This is the so-called Saemankeum project which, at 40,100 ha, is the world's largest on-going reclamation. The project near the cities of Kunsan and Cheonju aims to landfill the estuaries of the Mankyung and Tongjin Rivers by constructing a 33 km dyke linking the islands off the coast with each other and with the mainland. The Yellow Sea is situated midway on the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, one of the world's great migratory bird routes, which extends from Alaska and north-east Siberia through East Asia to Australia and New Zealand. This sea is bordered

by c. 1 million hectares of tidal-flats. These are critically important to a significant percentage of the flyway's shorebirds, and to nesting endemic birds such as Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi* (world population 5,000–10,000), Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes* (world population c. 2,200), and Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* (world population c. 615), which are all globally threatened. The Yellow Sea also supports a huge fishing industry, and many coastal communities are dependent on seaweed cultivation, salt production and shellfish harvesting. Research has shown that no fewer than two-thirds of all fish species found in Korean waters are dependent on tidal-flats during some part of their life-cycle. Despite this immense value, in the 1980s South Korea adopted a National Reclamation Master Plan with the objective of reclaiming 85% of all remaining tidal-flats, whilst in the mid-1990s China stated that it intended to reclaim almost 100% of its tidal-flats by 2018. A North Korean plan for

1980 to 1993 indicated that the country aimed to reclaim 300,000 ha of coastal wetlands. With many projects completed (including a single reclamation of 50,000 ha in the south-west of S Korea), Yellow Sea fish stocks have already been significantly depleted, and many waterfowl species appear to be in decline. In South Korea, where approximately 290,000 ha of tidal-flat still remain, research by the Korean Wetlands Alliance in 1998 located at least 13 coastal wetlands that supported more than 5,000 shorebirds at a time. Furthermore, in each of these sites at least three shorebird species occurred in internationally important concentrations. However, one site has already been largely reclaimed, two others are in the process of being completely reclaimed, and another already has a complete seawall along one side. Three sites are being negatively impacted and, along with Kanghwa Island, are targeted for more significant reclamation. No tidal wetlands are effectively protected,

though five wetlands have been saved from imminent destruction — at least in the short-term — through the efforts of the Korean Wetlands Alliance and support groups. The justification given for these reclamations is that they will increase the area of national territory, whilst creating land for agricultural uses and reservoirs to provide freshwater for industry and farming. Korean experts argue against the projects, pointing out that tidal-flats are already “national territory”, that much farmland is already under-used regionally and nationally (largely due to a rural exodus triggered by industrialisation) and that tidal-flats and sea shallows are critical to fisheries and aquaculture. In addition they also recall that the projects are clearly in breach of the “wise use of wetlands” concept enshrined in the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, to which South Korea acceded in 1997. The outstanding importance of the Saemankeum area for waterfowl is clearly shown by bird census data. For example, in 1998 its tidal-flats supported peak counts of 22,200 Dunlins *Calidris alpina* (representing 10% of the known flyway population of the Dunlins’ eastern race), 180 Spoon-billed Sandpipers *C. pygmaeus* (one of the largest counts ever world-wide; world population 4,000–5,000), 61 Nordmann’s Greenshanks *Tringa guttifer* (world population 1,000 only) and 38,500 Great Knots *Calidris tenuirostris* (representing more than 10% of the world population). On the basis of current data, the Saemankeum area is believed to be the

second most important site for Great Knot in Asia. In the past three years, at least 25 species of waterfowl have been recorded in internationally important concentrations, including up to 500 Saunders’s Gulls and 1–2% of the world’s Black-faced Spoonbills. All available evidence indicates that the destruction of the vital waterbird feeding areas at Saemankeum will inevitably reduce survival rates of many birds, and most probably cause the overall populations of these species to decline. Regional fisheries will also be devastated. As of November 1998, 56% of the 33 km seawall had already been completed with a target completion date for the entire scheme of 2000/2001. There is therefore little time left to oppose this project. But support for the Saemankeum project is fading, while opposition to it grows. Several ministries and government agencies (e.g. the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, and the Forestry Administration) have recently voiced their opposition to reclamation in general. A similar shift in policy direction can be detected in the July 1998 decision by the Ministry of Agriculture, the ministry responsible for the Saemankeum project, to cancel the 55,000 ha reclamation proposed for the Yongsan River region. Moreover, even the leading proponent of the Saemankeum project, the regional governor, You Jong-Keun, stated in January 1999 that the project would need to be reviewed or even stopped, if it were shown to impact negatively on the marine ecosystem. The Korean

Wetlands Alliance is asking people concerned by the Saemankeum project to send respectful emails or letters to Mr You Jong-Keun and the Agriculture Minister Mr Kim Sung-Hoon. A suggested form of words is: “please suspend the Saemankeum reclamation project to allow further urgently needed research on the ecological and economic consequences of completing this project. The Saemankeum area, together with the estuaries of the Mankyung and the Tongjin Rivers, is known to be vitally significant for sustaining economically important fish stocks and other marine resources in the region (for example, by providing spawning and nursing places), and of immense global importance for migratory waterfowl. Unless some solution can be found, whereby existing waterfowl populations and regional fishery resources can be maintained at existing levels, I would urge you to cancel the project. Although much money has already been spent on the project, the loss of the Saemankeum tidal flats to reclamation will cause much greater expense in the long term — through loss of fishery resources, increased pollution, and damage to South Korea’s international image. By cancelling this scheme, the world’s largest ongoing reclamation project, Korea will win respect world-wide.”
Addresses: Mr You, Jong-Keun
Governor of Chollabuk-do #1,
4-ga, Chungang-Dong,
Wansan-gu Cheonju City,
Chollabuk-do Republic of
Korea 560-761 email:
cbso@fiic.or.kr
Minister Kim, Sung-Hoon

Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Government Complex #1, Joongang-dong Kwacheon-si, Kyounggi-do Republic of Korea 422-760 email:

minister@maf.go.kr

The Korean Wetlands Alliance would also appreciate a copy of the email/letter. Its address is Korean Wetlands Alliance, KFEM Palyongdong 192-6 2F, Changwon 641-465 Republic of Korea email: jangjy@kfem.or.kr

Source: Korean Wetlands Alliance

PAKISTAN

Western Tragopan caught on film

The first ever footage of Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus* has been filmed in Pakistan by a joint WWF-WPA expedition. The World Wide Fund for Nature, BirdLife International and the World Pheasant Association have been working for several years with the Pakistani government and other NGO partners to conserve the tragopan whose dwindling population is restricted to the disappearing forests of north-west India and north-east Pakistan. In June 1998, Rob Whale of WPA and Dr Roger Sutton of WWF led a 16-man survey team, including personnel from the Himalayan Jungle Project, to an area in the upper Palas above 3,000 m. The team located tragopans and tape-lured them within range but the birds kept hidden in the undergrowth. On the fourth day cameraman Raza Abbas of Pakistan's Houbara Foundation International was in a hide when a male Western Tragopan climbed into a birch

tree behind him. He succeeded in shooting five minutes of film backwards over his shoulder! Richard Howard, WPA chairman, said: "We're delighted with the film. It's unique and it's tangible — the visible tip of an iceberg of co-operation between conservation bodies like ours and local government wildlife departments." A still taken from this first ever video film is shown on page 29.

Source: World Pheasant Association

THAILAND

Hollywood tramples over Thai paradise island

The makers of a movie about life on an unspoiled island have spoiled their island film location to make it look more like Hollywood's version of paradise. "The Beach" starring Leonardo Di Caprio (whose last taste of saltwater was in "Titanic") has been filmed on Phi Phi Leh island, one of Thailand's foremost maritime National Parks. The native vegetation at the location — Maya Beach — was bulldozed to create more space for a scene depicting a football game. And the filmmakers, 20th Century Fox, replaced Giant Milkweed, Sea Pandanus, Spider Lily and other beach grasses with 100 non-native Coconut Palms. Conservationists feared that removing the natural vegetation would create serious erosion, and they were right. The beach has already been eroded and now local people are worried about how much of the beach and bay will remain after the monsoons. Phi Phi Leh Island is supposedly

protected as a National Park and is key to the local tourist economy. Thai activists report that Thailand's Royal Forestry Department violated their own regulations and were allegedly bought off by 20th Century Fox, who paid the government four million baht. A lawsuit was filed, but an injunction to stop further destruction of the island was denied. Now Thai conservationists are asking people across the world to boycott the film when it reaches the cinema. After all, Americans would never allow Thai filmmakers to bulldoze Yellowstone or any other US National Park. A petition against 20th Century Fox is circulating on the Internet or people can write to the film's producer expressing their outrage. The address is: Andrew MacDonald, Producer, The Beach c/o Carol Sewell 10201 W. Pico Blvd. Building 89, Room 224 Los Angeles, CA 90035. There is a website with more information about Maya Bay at: www.wildrockies.org/wve/ The petition organiser is bryony@wildrockies.org

Source: UKBirdnet

Owls in Ladakh

Little is known about the distribution or habits of owls in the highlands of Ladakh, India. Here, Otto Pfister discusses some exciting observations of the owl species seen during his visits to the region, including a record of interbreeding between two races of the Little Owl *Athene noctua*, observations on the nesting habits of Eagle Owls *Bubo bubo* and the first sighting of the little-known Pallid Scops Owl *Otus brucei* in Ladakh.

Introduction

To date, four species of owl (Strigidae) have been described as occurring within the high-altitude plateau of Ladakh, India, namely the Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* in the lower tree-covered valley bottoms,¹ the Short-eared Owl *A. flammeus* as a migrant in the eastern marshy, grassy plains,² the Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo* as a resident in rocky areas³ and the Little Owl *Athene noctua* found more or less all over Ladakh in suitable habitat.^{2,4} During the summer of 1997, a fifth owl species was added to the list — the little-known Pallid Scops Owl *Otus brucei*.

Ladakh, with its remote and hostile valleys, represents the westernmost extension of the mighty Tibetan plateau which varies in altitude from 2,700–7,000 m. In summer the temperature can rise to 35 °C, whilst in winter it can get as low as -45 °C. The most rugged mountains in Ladakh are found towards the lower western border area with Kashmir. The eastern region of Ladakh that borders Tibet has extensive dry desert-like plains and large lakes surrounded by rolling hills at elevations between 4,000–5,000 m. The distribution and behaviour of owls in these highlands is almost unknown and practically the only references to owls in the region date back to the beginning of this century.⁵

The sightings described here were primarily recorded over the period from the end of May to mid-October 1997, within areas extending from the Manali Road (4,600 m) eastwards into the Hanle valley (4,300 m), south of the Indus River.

Little Owls

The distribution of "Hutton's Owlet" *Athene noctua bactriana* is described by Ali⁵ as covering the area from Iran and Iraq east-north-eastwards through Afghanistan and N Pakistan, Kashmir to Syr Darya. In addition, it is not uncommonly encountered in suitable habitat in western Ladakh, in the Indus valley. The range of "Tibetan Owlet" *A. n. ludlowi* is much more restricted, being limited to the area from eastern Ladakh eastwards

through Tibet, N Sikkim and N Bhutan.⁵ Ladakh can therefore be considered as the zone where the two races meet and this was confirmed by some exciting observations described below, when the two subspecies were recorded interbreeding.

My first encounter with Little Owls in Ladakh dates back to September 1994, when a small owl was sighted on a rocky boulder-covered slope at Tso-Kar (4,600 m). Closer observation revealed that it was of the subspecies *bactriana*, "Hutton's Owlet". The upperparts were chocolate-brown to sandy-brown, covered with white spots. The underparts were brownish-white, heavily streaked with chocolate-brown down to the vent. The brown head was streaked with white and the clear white supercilium gave the bird a "wise" appearance. This subspecies was also observed later in my journey on the northern and eastern slopes of the Tso-Kar plains, in the upper Indus Valley (4,000 m) and near the Chang-La pass (at over 5,000 m).



Map of Ladakh

In June the following year, at the same locality, I observed a Little Owl that appeared to be the same size but bulkier, with a darker chocolate-brown back, but again conspicuously spotted with white. The underparts were dirtier white, less heavily streaked with brown and with a broad dark grey-brown wash across the upper breast. This plumage was consistent with that of the rare race *ludlowi*, the “Tibetan Owlet”.⁶

In June 1996, the Tibetan Owlet was again sighted, hunting during the daytime and seen to disappear whilst carrying a kill up the rocky slope. A few days later, at sunset, the same owlet was watched whilst it gave a melancholic *puu*, *puu*, *puu* or *puui*, *puui*, *puui* call (with a 4–5 second interval between phrases). Suddenly a second owlet settled next to the caller. It was instantly recognisable as a Hutton’s Owlet, like the one identified in 1994. The pair began excitedly calling to one another: a chorus of alternate chortles and screeches, similar to the behaviour observed in the Spotted Owlet *Athene brama* during the breeding season. After a short while the two birds flew off and were not seen again before my departure. This brief observation indicated that the two birds were probably breeding together — a possible example of interbreeding between the two subspecies.

Examination of skins of the two subspecies in the Natural History Museum, Tring, UK, confirmed my earlier field observations (Table 1).

Owls are known to be loyal to their breeding sites, so I was hopeful that I would be able to confirm the suspected interbreeding of these two races during my return to Ladakh in 1997.

I reached Tso-Kar in early June during a spell of heavy snowfall and freezing temperatures. The following day at mid-morning, I relocated the Tibetan Owlet at the same site as previously,

sitting on a big boulder with its plumage fluffed up, keeping itself warm, defying the overcast frosty weather. However, its expected partner, the Hutton’s Owlet, was not in view. Later that evening I located the Tibetan Owlet sitting on a different rock, again with feathers puffed up, as it surveyed the surroundings with its bright yellow eyes.

During the following two days the bird was regularly watched around the same place. In the early morning of 8th June, the Tibetan Owlet was found sitting upright on a rock with a blood-covered red bill, overlooking the grassland, away from its usual territory. The change in its behaviour was obvious. So as not to disturb the bird, I watched from some distance through binoculars as it carried on hunting. The bird scanned the grass-plains below, frequently employing head-bobbing movements to gauge distances. Suddenly the owl dived between some nearby boulders — to alight a few seconds later atop one of the stones with a Royle’s Vole *Alticola roylei* in its strong blackish claws. Holding the catch down with one foot, the owl tore into its victim’s throat with its bill, then carried it away up into the rocks. About five minutes later, it returned to resume hunting. I set up a small portable hide close to where the owl had disappeared in the rocks and waited. About one hour later the *puui*, *puui*, *puui* call of the Tibetan Owlet was heard nearby. To my surprise, the cries were immediately answered by a hoarse *kraae*, *kraae* from very close by. Carefully scanning the surrounding rocks, I found the well-camouflaged Hutton’s Owlet sitting between two rock slabs about 10 meters away — until then I had been unaware of its presence. Seconds later the Tibetan Owlet landed a few meters away from my observation point, calling in excitement and

Table 1: Comparison of Hutton’s *Athene noctua bactriana* and Tibetan *A. n. ludlowi* Owlets

	Hutton’s Owlet <i>A. n. ludlowi</i> (4 skins)	Tibetan Owlet <i>A. n. bactriana</i> (9 skins)
Size	21–23 cm	Identical
Colour upperparts	Lighter chocolate-sandy brown, spotted off-white	Darker chocolate-brown, spotted dirty white
Nape and head	Heavier streaked. Supercilium conspicuous	Less heavily spotted and streaked. Supercilium less prominent due to paler facial plumage
“Chevron”/“V” neck-mark	Less prominent	More prominent
Colour of underparts	White, tinged brownish and heavily chocolate-brown streaked to vent	Dirty-white, streaked lighter sandy-brown mainly up to belly. Prominent grey-brown wash over breast
Tarsi/feet	Feathered to toes	More lightly feathered to toes
Bill	Yellow to greenish-grey	More yellow

holding another vole in its claws. The Hutton's Owlet landed on the same boulder, next to the successful hunter. The food pass ritual took place after a few seconds: a short but vigorous battle ensued between the two. Afterwards, the Hutton's Owlet, keeping the prey in its bill, fluttered down from the rock and disappeared through a narrow nest-hole entrance below a neighbouring flat boulder.

The Tibetan Owlet, after a short spell of preening, flew off. Within 15 minutes the Hutton's Owlet reappeared in the nest-hole opening, with a red beak and with its central facial plumage soaked in blood. It returned to its original location between the rocks to preen, but after a short while it re-entered the nest chamber and did not leave it again for the rest of the morning.

During the subsequent days the owl pair was watched pursuing their parental duties. The Tibetan Owlet, presumably the male, was observed hunting and supplying 2–4 small mammals each morning until about mid-day. These prey items were mainly voles, a species of which was found in abundance in the adjoining grassland, but also included a smaller grey-blue mouse species that inhabited the rocks. During the early afternoon the parents rested for a few hours until the male resumed hunting towards the latter part of the afternoon, supplying another 1–2 kills to the nest-hole before dusk. Observation at night was not possible due to a lack of appropriate equipment, but recording the owls' frequent calls throughout the dark around the campsite proved evidence of their activities. Fresh pellets collected from the male's roosting site disclosed its major food source as being insects (moths and beetles), whereas old pellets from the same site contained largely vole and mice fur and bones. Pellets from the female roost indicated a mixed diet of mice and insects which did not seem to vary appreciably in composition as the chicks grew.

Six weeks later, when I revisited the site, three fledged Little Owl chicks, in addition to the two adult birds, were found roosting in the vicinity of the nesting hole. Two of the juveniles resembled the Hutton's Owlet. They appeared overall lighter in plumage particularly their upper underparts, which were strongly streaked with light chocolate-brown, whereas the lower belly and vent were almost pure white in colour. The brown wings were densely barred with white and the paler brown back was more streaked with whitish. The third offspring looked like a Tibetan Owlet: the pale greyish wash across the breast was

already visible. The next visit on 20th August produced only one remaining chick near the nest site in addition to the parental birds and, on my final visit in the third week of September, no Little Owls were sighted in the breeding territory. At this time a spider's web, partly covering the entrance hole to the nest-chamber, clearly indicated that the birds had vacated it for another day-time roosting site.

Eagle Owls

Hanle valley

On a cold clear day in mid-June 1997 I first observed an Eagle Owl in the Hanle valley of Ladakh. It was warming itself up in early morning sunshine, perching on a dominant cliff overlooking the marshy plain. The long dark ear-tufts and large bright orange-golden eyes surrounded by a conspicuous grey facial disc were the most striking features of this bird at first sight. The owl was perfectly camouflaged and blended into its natural rocky surroundings. The upperparts were brownish-grey, barred with darker brown-grey (in an almost scaly pattern) and heavily dotted dark brown rather than streaked, particularly over the mantle and the rufous-tinged neck. The underparts were lighter grey at the base, finely barred darker grey-brown and, mainly towards the upper part of the breast and throat, heavily streaked dark-grey. The overall paler grey appearance, compared to the usual blackish-brown coloration of European Eagle Owls, suggested it was either the subspecies known as the Himalayan Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo hemachalana* or the Turkestan Eagle Owl *B. b. turcomanus*. Both races are reported to occur in Ladakh, yet their status and distribution range seem to be unclear.⁵

The following morning the owl was found on its cliff again but this time I was able to follow it later to where it settled to roost under an overhanging slab of rock. By scanning the slope with a telescope I discovered a crevice extensively covered with white droppings. Thorough observation of this spot revealed two inquisitive, unequally sized, down-covered owl chicks. The larger bird was probably 2–3 cm bigger than its sibling. Later, in the afternoon, I was able to cross the waist-deep icy waters of the Hanle river to inspect the roosting site more closely. When I suddenly appeared from behind a large rock, a second adult bird, previously undetected, flew off from its roost giving a loud, high-pitched, fast and penetrating *wheep-wheep-weep* alarm call. It

landed a short distance further uphill on an exposed boulder. I settled down about 60 m away from the white-spotted crevice, closely watched by the adult owls. The two chicks were no longer visible, probably having retreated in response to the adult's alarm call. However, it did not take long until two pairs of large, curious golden-orange eyes appeared around the edge of the crevice. The remains of fish everywhere provided evidence of the offsprings' staple food source.

The owls soon grew accustomed to me visiting their territory over the following days. One adult appeared to be larger and more brownish-tinged on the back than its partner. By early July the quickly growing chicks were beginning to lose their down, and the soft fluff was blown away by the warm summer breezes. The fresh new plumage appearing was grey-brown with a rufous wash, heavily spotted and streaked dark brown. At this time items other than fish were found to be part of the young birds' diet. These included Woolly Hare *Lepus oiostolus* and Pika *Ochotona* sp. and, towards the end of July, ducklings and even adult Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* were added.

By now the young owls had left their nesting crevice and were fluttering around, exercising for their first short flights. During the daytime they roosted in different parts of the cliff and in rock-holes. The food was nevertheless still consumed near the nest. All the down had now been shed and the juveniles closely resembled their parents, yet they were still considerably smaller in size, with a more yellow-rufous brown-tinged plumage, their facial discs still poorly defined and lacking ear-tufts.

By this stage I felt confident enough to inspect the nest site at close range. The crevice, situated below an overhanging cliff, was about 70 cm deep and the bare sandy floor was covered with small pebbles, but no nesting material was present. Examination of pellets littering the site confirmed the identity of the food items previously observed.

Three weeks later, during the second part of August, I revisited the nesting site but the family had vacated the area. From examination of kill remains and pellets they must have left about ten days previously. One extremely big, 13 cm long pellet remaining contained, in addition to a large number of fish bones, a full leg of a large raptor! The tibia, tarsus and golden-yellow, finely scaled foot, the sharp strong blackish claws bent inwards, were fully preserved in one piece, although the leg was folded at the "knee". The front of the tarsus was dark brown (with rufous

fringes) and whitish-feathered for its full length, whereas the back showed a wax-yellow to whitish-yellow covering of scales. The same pellet also contained a complete, 9.7 cm long, "ulna", a vertebra almost 4 cm long, plentiful dark brown and light body feathers and some 5–10 mm sized pieces of gravel. Analysing these carcass remains suggested that the prey had been a buzzard *Buteo* sp., perhaps most likely, given the leg colour, an Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*.

Hanle

From late June I had also been watching a second owl site, in the steep rocks behind the Hanle Monastery, about 15 km south of the above described breeding site. Though unoccupied, this roosting place was marked by numerous old pellets containing fur and bones of prey such as Woolly Hare, Pika, Royle's Vole and Himalayan Marmot *Marmota aurea*. At times entire skulls of smaller rodents and also fish bones were found. Feathers scattered all over the site all pointed to it being normally occupied by Eagle Owls. Some time later, on one occasion chick-down was found in an adjoining small valley, yet an intensive search of potential nest sites proved fruitless. In late September, however, the roost site behind the monastery was again found to be in use.

Sumdo

While surveying the area of Sumdo in early June, a single adult Eagle Owl was observed in a niche situated on a steep rock precipice. The bird was often noticed at this roost during subsequent visits over the following months. Then, in mid-September, two immature Eagle Owls were seen sun-bathing on a cliff about 700 m further down the valley. The ledge used as a perch by the birds led into a deep crevice in the vertical rock wall.

As I watched, one bird moved further uphill to a rock hole, shortly before a Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* soared by. The eagle did a sharp U-turn, and proceeded to fly at the owl at full speed! The owl jumped out of its cavity holding its wings wide open and pushed its feet outwards with claws expended forward. The eagle turned and nose-dived away. As it did so, it flew over the second owl, which also took flight. With the owls gone, the entrance of the crevice was free for me to inspect.

The crack proved to be about three metres deep and just wide enough to squeeze into. It contained a fantastic collection of pellets and shed feathers, and several areas were very heavily covered in owl droppings, suggesting this was



an ancient owl nesting site. The nest itself consisted of a sandy bowl about 40 cm wide which was situated in a side-chamber about two metres inside the crevice. No nesting material was found. Examination of fresh and old pellets indicated that the owls fed largely on Himalayan Marmot, Pika, Woolly Hare, voles, birds, fish and even insects (beetles).

It seems this large but easily overlooked owl is more widely distributed in Ladakh than previously thought. In addition to the observations described above, local people also reported this species from areas south of Leh airport across the Indus River (3,500 m) and also from the Tso-Kar eastern slopes (4,700 m) near Thugje village. These recorded sightings, at elevations between 3,500 and 4,700 m, indicate that Eagle Owls have a wide range of altitudinal tolerance and their occurrence seems to depend most on the availability of adequate roosting (and nesting) sites in steep rock walls.

The Eagle Owl's breeding season must start early in the year since the chicks observed in mid-June, although still in down, had already grown to about 30 cm. The two nest-sites found in summer 1997 were both located in steep rock-slopes at about 4,300 m altitude, and the lack of nesting material in either suggests the owls lay their eggs on the bare ground. As with Little Owls (see above) Eagle Owl families probably mostly vacate their nesting site shortly after the chicks have fledged to occupy different roosts or territories — this possibly explains the re-occupation of the Hanle Monastery roost in September.

Pallid Scops Owls

On a bright sunlit day, after an overnight snow shower in early October, my attention was drawn to repeated alarm calls coming from the resident



- 1 Eagle Owl *Bubo bubo*, Hanle valley
- 2 Eagle Owl chicks in down (peeping out from nest crevice)
- 3 Pallid Scops Owl *Otus brucei*, Hanle
- 4 Tibetan Owlet *Athene noctua ludlowi*, Tso-Kar
- 5 Hutton's Owlet *Athene noctua bactriana*, Tso-Kar
- 6 Tibetan Owlet with kill (vole)
- 7 Tibetan Owlet (m) with kill (left), faced by Hutton's Owlet (f) (right)
- 8 Handing over of kill from male to female
- 9 Hutton's Owlet (f) with kill beside Tibetan Owlet (m)
- 10 One of the 3 fledged offspring of the mixed Little Owl pair



Black Redstarts *Phoenicurus ochrurus*, Desert Wheatears *Oenanthe deserti* and Robin Accentors *Prunella rubeculoides* that lived near the old willow tree below the Hanle Monastery. Closer inspection revealed two small owls roosting motionless in the centre of this sole tree, their bright yellow eyes half-closed. One bird huddled close to the main trunk whilst the second bird, half-covered by the tree's yellowing snow-laden leaves, was apparently enjoying an early morning sunbathe. Their back plumage was dull sandy-brown to greyish, rather neatly and boldly streaked dark-brown, with darker brown wing-coverts. Their underparts were paler, almost whitish, with distinct grey streaking. Short ear-tufts were discernible. The pair was identified as the little-known Pallid Scops Owl. They remained in their roost the whole day, only moving in the late evening so as to catch the last of the day's sunbeams. The following morning they had left, not to return.

Ali⁵ reports that the Pallid Scops Owl is a very poorly known species within the Indian subcontinent. Its patchy distribution extends from Pakistan westwards into the Middle East and it is reported also to migrate in autumn eastwards along the Himalayan foothills as far as eastern India, up to elevations of 1,800 m. The observation of this species in Ladakh at an elevation of 4,500 m extends the known range as this is the first record within the northern Himalayan slopes and it is also the highest altitudinal record at which the species has been recorded.

Possible Short-eared Owl

In late September while camping near "Mahe bridge", the check-post attendants told me of a recent sighting of a medium-sized owl perching at dusk on a rock ledge across the Indus River. They pointed to pictures of Short-eared Owl in my field guides, although the rocky terrain did not seem to be the species's preferred habitat. A search for the bird at dusk proved fruitless until 8 p.m. when a soft, yet far-carrying, 000-000 was audible. Scanning with a torchlight revealed two medium sized pale owls gliding and circling playfully together in the strong winds. However, the poor views obtained, and therefore lack of observation of clear identification marks, means that the possibility that they were Eagle Owls cannot be excluded.

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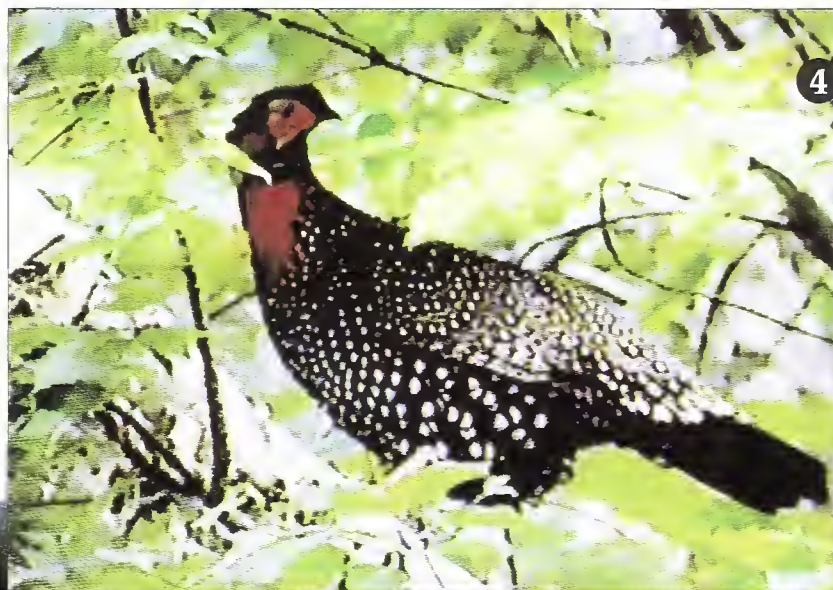
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1. Cerulean Paradise Flycatcher *Eutrichomyias rowleyi*. More on the exciting rediscovery of this species will be published in a future issue. (Photo: Jon Riley)
2. Female Golden Bush Robin *Tarsiger chrysaeus*, Doi Inthanon, Thailand. The bird reported in *From the Field*, p. 55. (Photo: Nikolas Haas)
3. Relict Gull *Larus relictus*. A remarkable 315 birds were seen near Beidahe, China, in September 1998. (Photo: John Holmes)
4. Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus*, this photo is a video grab, taken from the first footage of this species ever taken in the wild. Read more about this exciting occurrence in *Around the Orient*, p. 21. (Photo: Raza Abbas)
5. Sangihe Scops Owl *Otus collari*. This recently described species is named in honour of the OBC Chairman, Dr Nigel Collar. (Photo: Jon Riley)



3



5



Birdwatching Areas

Sangihe and Talaud islands, Indonesia



The remote Sangihe and Talaud islands are situated in the Celebes Sea between Sulawesi and the Philippine island of Mindanao. At the northern limit of the fascinating Wallacean biogeographical region, the islands are home to nine endemic species, five of which are endangered. Sangihe has little natural forest left and there are two key sites: Talawid in the north of the island is a good area for parrots, whilst Gunung Sahengbalira in the south is the only extensive area of forest left on Sangihe and has

populations of four endangered endemic species, including two found only at this site. Talaud is a less developed and more remote archipelago. The largest island, Karakelang, has extensive areas of protected forest, supporting important populations of parrots.

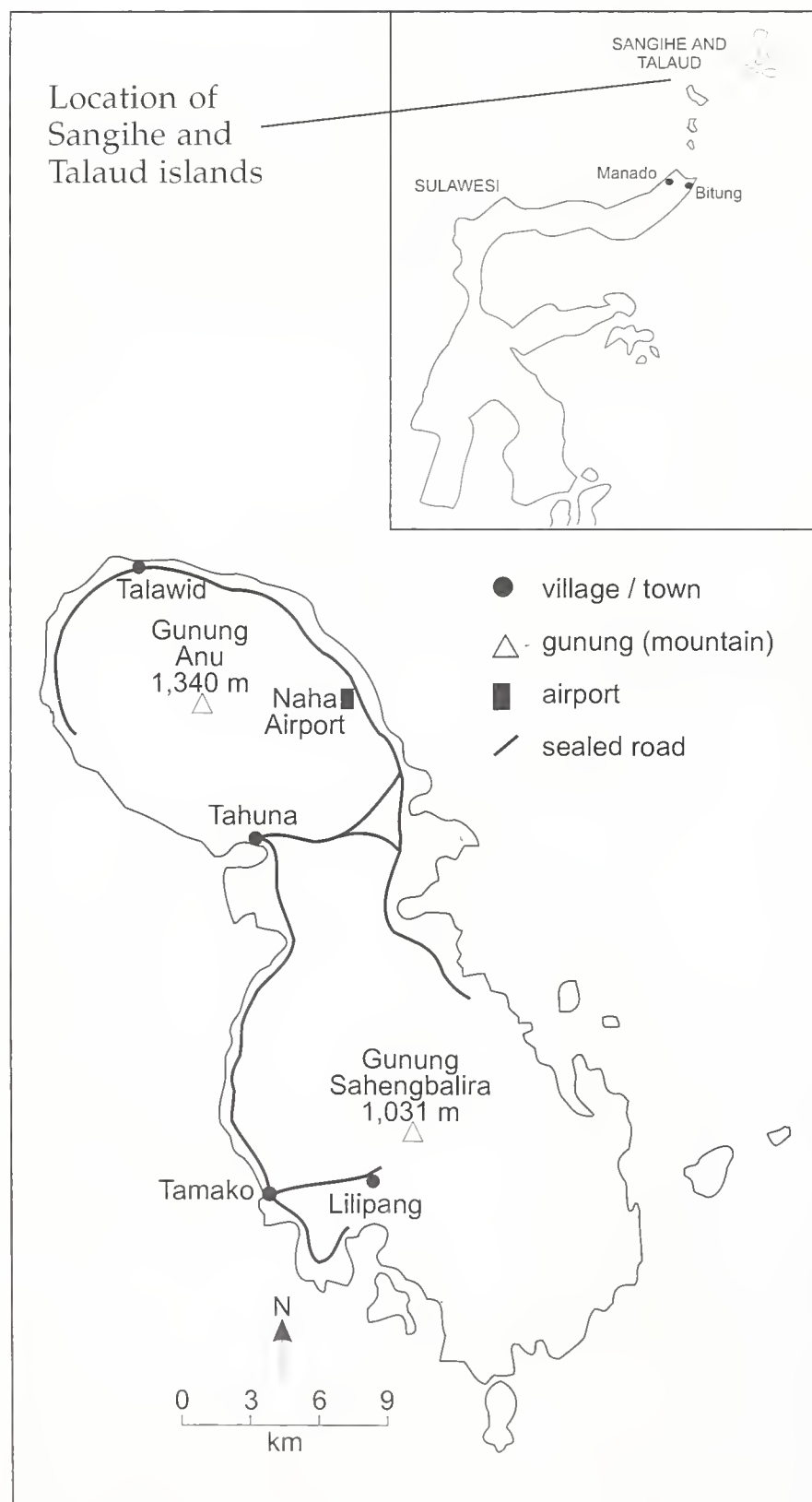
The islands can be visited year round, but the most productive time is during the drier months between April and September; the wet season from September to March can make the steep terrain very challenging. Below we give access and accommodation details for the island's key sites, along with notes on the more interesting species.

Access and accommodation

The islands are accessible from Manado, the provincial capital of North Sulawesi, which is served by international Silk Air flights from Singapore. In early 1999, flights to Sangihe and Talaud had fallen victim to the country's economic crisis and it was only possible to reach the islands by boat.

From Sulawesi

Ferries depart from Manado harbour at 6 p.m. every Monday, Wednesday and Friday evening for the 12 h crossing to Tahuna, Sangihe. Ferries to Beo, Karakelang, Talaud and Lirung depart from Manado every Tuesday and Thursday evening at 6 p.m. The *Pulo Teratai* and the *Valentine* travel direct, the journey to Beo taking approximately 20 h; the *Agape Star* travels via Tamako and Tahuna, adding six hours to the journey time. Return ferries from Tahuna, Sangihe, are on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday evening at 6 p.m.; from Talaud on Wednesday and Friday afternoons. It is advisable to buy tickets at the harbour in the morning to ensure a place to sleep on these crowded boats. The *KM Tilongkabila*, which has luxury cabins, sails through the islands once every 28 days. It leaves Bitung, North Sulawesi, sails directly to Talaud and then returns to Bitung via Tahuna, before heading on to Gorontalo. Schedules and tickets are available from PELNI: Jl. Sam Ratulangi 7, Manado (telephone 0431-862844).



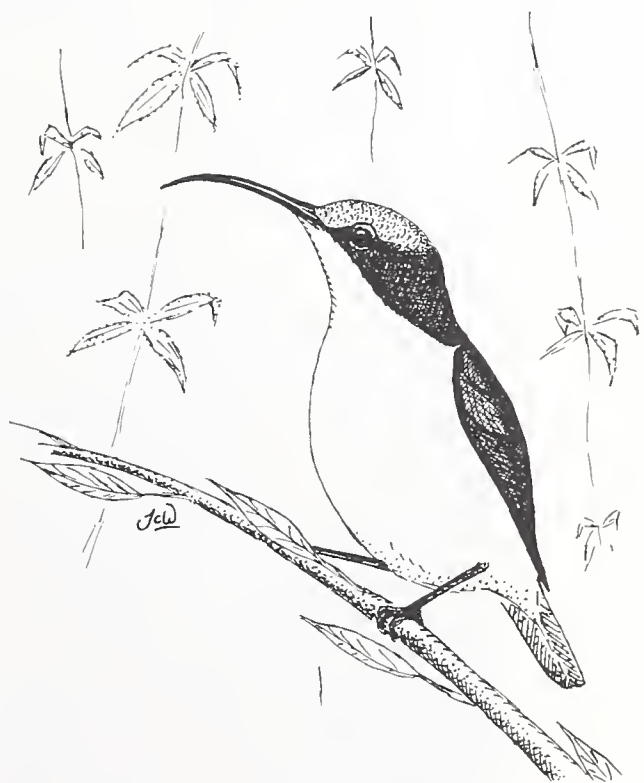
Map of Sangihe.

SANGIHE

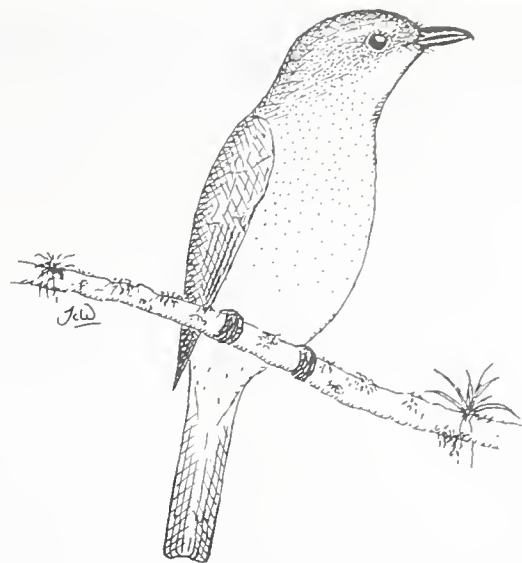
The infrastructure on Sangihe is well developed with good roads, hotels and international telephone links. Tahuna, the capital, is the transport hub and buses to all towns on the island can be found at the new bus station on Jalan Makaampo; one can also charter mikrolets (blue minibuses) to anywhere on the island for approximately US\$10. In Tahuna stay at the Hotel Nasional, Jalan Makaampo, (telephone 0432-21185/21462). There are many places to eat, the best probably the Marina Coffee House next door to Hotel Nasional. Food and supplies are available in Tahuna for trips to Talawid and Gunung Sahengbalira. Perhaps the star bird on Sangihe is the Cerulean Paradise-flycatcher *Eutrichomyias rowleyi* that was recently rediscovered by the Action Sampiri team. People wishing to search for this species should first contact the local office of Action Sampiri which will be opening soon.

Gunung Sahengbalira

The easiest way to get to this site is from Tamako (regular bus from Tahuna, a two-hour journey). Accommodation is available at the Rainbow Losmen in Lilipan B village which can be reached by minibus from Tamako; ask for Frets Pangimangen. Rooms with breakfast cost c. US\$3 single or c. US\$5 double, with full board for c. US\$3 extra per person per day. Frets knows how to reach the forest on Sahengbalira and will organise guides or porters for you. Narrow trails lead into the forest and a path runs along most of the top of the ridge. The area of forest remaining on Gunung Sahengbalira is probably no more than 400 ha and to reach it is a two-hour climb.



Elegant Sunbird *Aethopyga duyvenbodei* by Jim Wardill



Sangihe Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla sanghirensis* by Jim Wardill

Birds

Most species occur in the plantations surrounding the forest and it is certainly worthwhile birding them, particularly for skulking, understorey birds like the uncommon Red-bellied Pitta *Pitta erythrogaster* and Hooded Pitta *P. sordida* which is heard and seen regularly, and the occasional Lilac-marked Kingfisher *Cittura cyanotis*.

Common species in the area include Black-naped Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus melauospila*, Blue-tailed Imperial Pigeon *Ducula concinna*, Slender-billed Cuckoo Dove *Macropygia auboinensis* and Black-naped Oriole *Oriolus chinensis*. Sometimes mixed-species flocks can be seen, usually comprising Yellow-sided Flowerpecker *Dicaeum aureolimbatum*, Grey-sided Flowerpecker *D. celebicum*, Brown-throated Sunbird *Anthreptes malacensis* and Black Sunbird *Nectarinia aspasia*. Overhead can be seen Moluccan Swiftlet *Collocalia infusata*, Glossy Swiftlet *C. esculenta* and migrant White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus*.

The endangered endemic Sangihe Hanging Parrot *Loriculus catauene* (local names: lungsihe/kurehi) is seen regularly, usually in small groups flying fast overhead. Listen for the high-pitched *tsee tsee* flight call. The newly described endemic Sangihe Scops Owl *Otus collari* (local name: burung hantu) is also relatively common in both plantations and forest, and is best located by listening for its down-slurred whistle in the hours after dusk.

Possibly the commonest species in forest is the beautiful Elegant Sunbird *Aethopyga duyvenbodei* (local name: salumisi bamburaeng) which can be seen at all altitudes. There are occasional sightings in the forest, but the easiest place to see the sunbird is in old, scrubby plantations close to the forest edge.



The recently rediscovered endemic Sangihe Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla sanghirensis* (local name: sohabe chocklat) is only known from sub-montane forest above c. 700 m on the Gunung Sahengbalira ridge. It is not uncommon and has been seen in quite large flocks, but can be surprisingly elusive. Birds are active throughout the day and a good strategy is to follow the ridge-top path and listen for their distinctive *chweeep chweeep* calls, not unlike young chickens.

In addition to the endemic species there are a number of very distinct and rare subspecies confined to the mountain. The Sangihe race of Golden Bulbul *Alphoixos affinis* appears to be restricted to the ridge forest where it is often very vocal. Other specialities, known only from specimens and a few sight records, include the endemic subspecies of Sulawesi Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx fallax sangirensis* and the well-marked subspecies of Black-crowned White-eye *Zosterops atrifrons nehrkorni*. These birds can be very difficult to see and, again, much patience is required.

Talawid

Birding is in plantations and forest patches around the villages of Talawid and Talawid Atas, northern Sangihe. Talawid is reached by bus to Kendahe and accommodation is with Ali and Hety at the school in Talawid Atas; pay approximately US\$6 a night and bring your own food. Ali will guide you to the best sites, including a Great-billed Parrot *Tanygnathus megalorynchos* roost; pay US\$6 per day.

Birds

Although lacking the true forest specialists of Gunung Sahengbalira, many commoner species can be seen more easily at Talawid, together with others absent from the south. Raptors are well represented with Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* common, White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* rare, Chinese Goshawk *Accipiter*

soloensis common whilst on migration between October and March, and Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* rare and only at higher altitudes.

In the undergrowth both pitta species are quite common, but Hooded Pitta is especially easy to see, as is Lilac-marked Kingfisher.

The main reason to visit Talawid is to search for the rare Red-and-blue Lory *Eos histrio* (local name: sumpihi). This beautiful parrot is endemic to Sangihe and Talaud, but the population of the nominate Sangihe race is extremely small, and lories have only been seen at Talawid; birds were recorded in 1995, but absent from the site in 1996, and should be looked for in both forest patches and in plantations.

Small remnant forest patches attract many pigeons and parrots to Talawid. In addition to species listed for Gunung Sahengbalira Grey-cheeked Green Pigeon *Treron griseicauda*, Pink-necked Green Pigeon *T. vernans*, Pied Imperial Pigeon *Ducula bicolor* and Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis* are all very common, whilst Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* is seen regularly along the trails. Azure-rumped Parrots *Tanygnathus sumatranus* are commonly heard at night, and this is the best site for Sangihe Hanging Parrot on the island. Sulawesi Owl *Tyto rosenbergii* occurs in the plantations and Sangihe Scops Owl is also to be found here. Sunbirds and flowerpeckers are common and Elegant Sunbird is also seen regularly. Talawid is also a good site for the endemic race of Sulawesi Cicadabird *Coracina morio salvadorii*, which can be elusive at Gunung Sahengbalira.

Mammals

At both sites the endemic Rosenberg's Squirrel *Callosciurus rosenbergi* is very common and easily seen (and heard). Endemic races of Sulawesi Tarsier *Tarsius spectrum* and Sulawesi Small Cuscus *Strigocuscus celebensis* can be seen, but both are mainly nocturnal.

TALAUD

The best birding is on the largest island, Karakelang, using the capital Beo as a base. Catch the ferry direct to Beo; if travelling on the PELNI ferry to Lirung, catch a connecting boat or bus, otherwise the ferries all call in at Beo. On arrival, contact the Beo PHPA officers who guard the 22,000 ha hunting reserve in the centre of the island; the office is a short walk from Beo harbour. The officers will arrange accommodation in a local house, whilst food and other supplies are

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1. Lilac-marked Kingfisher *Cittura cyanotis* (Photo: Jim Wardill)
 2. Male Elegant Sunbird *Aethopyga duyvenbodei* (Photo: Jon Ekstrom)
 3. Sangihe Hanging Parrot *Loriculus catamene* (Photo: Jon Riley)
 4. Sangihe Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla sanghirensis* (Photo: Jim Wardill)
 5. Primary forest at Malamenggu (Photo: Jim Wardill)

available at Beo market. Almost all of Talaud's best birds can be seen in the plantations and forest to the south of Beo: simply follow the road. To enter the reserve and enjoy some excellent forest birding negotiate with the PHPA. Recommended sites include Lobo, Awit and Rae: trek inland for a day from these villages and set up camp. Away from the forest, migrant waders and other shorebirds are often seen around the coast and seabirds are seasonally numerous offshore.

Birds

Philippine Scrubfowl *Megapodius cumingii* and Red-bellied Pitta are very common in all forest and secondary areas, a good site for the former species being the tiny Sara islands between Karakelang and Salibabu. Rarer forest-floor species on Karakelang include the newly described Talaud Bush-hen *Amaurornis magnirostris* (local name: tambing-tambing), the Nicobar Pigeon *Caloenas nicobarica* and the rarely seen Malayan Night Heron *Gorsachius melanolophus*.

Rails are heard regularly in marshy areas, a good site is just south of Beo; Buff-banded Rail *Gallirallus philippensis*, Plain Bush-hen *Amaurornis olivacea*, White-breasted Waterhen *A. phoenicurus* and Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* have been observed, but perhaps most interesting is the newly described Talaud Rail *Gymnocrex talandensis* (local name: tu-a). This species can be seen from the road, but all although the most fortunate observers will need much time and patience to see this very shy bird.

Three species of swiftlet are believed resident on Talaud: Moluccan and Glossy Swiftlet are common and there are unconfirmed records of Uniform Swiftlet *Aerodramus vanikorensis*.

Of the five kingfisher species, Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* is found along rivers and in coastal areas; Ruddy Kingfisher *Halcyon coromanda* occurs in forest and plantations, especially in winter; Sacred Kingfisher *Todiramphus sancta* is a regular migrant visitor; and Collared Kingfisher *T. chloris* is common in coastal habitats and plantations. Of most interest to the visiting birder will be the intriguing endemic Talaud Kingfisher *T. enigma* (local name: sieeta hutan) which can be found easily in forested areas. Often seen along rivers or perched in the mid-storey, it differs from the very similar Collared Kingfisher not only in its choice of habitat, but also by its smaller size and shorter bill and tail.

Karakelang now supports the only viable population of the Red-and-blue Lory (local names: sampiri/luring) which is still common on the island, especially in the north, but is threatened by habitat loss and trapping. Other parrots are common in forest, but occur in plantations too, including Golden-mantled Racquet-tail *Prioniturus platurus*, the endangered Blue-naped Parrot *Tanygnathus lucionensis*, Azure-rumped Parrot and Great-billed Parrot: Talaud is the only place in the world where three *Tanygnathus* parrot species co-exist.

Four species of *Ducula* pigeon can be seen: Green Imperial Pigeon *D. aenea* and Blue-tailed Imperial Pigeon are very common in forest; the threatened small-island specialist, Grey Imperial Pigeon *D. pickeringii* is uncommon, but most records have come from secondary forest south of Beo; the fourth species, Pied Imperial Pigeon, is rare.

Common species in both plantations and forest include the following, all represented by endemic subspecies: Sulawesi Cicadabird, Rufous Paradise-flycatcher *Terpsiphone cinnamomea*, Grey-sided Flowerpecker, Black Sunbird, Everett's White-eye *Zosterops everetti*, Asian Glossy Starling *Aplonis panayensis* and Black-naped Oriole. Another small island specialist, the Island Monarch *Monarcha cinerascens* seems to be restricted to forest, where pairs and small groups are noisy and conspicuous.

Along coasts Pacific Reef Egret *Egretta sacra*, Malaysian Plover *Charadrius peronii* and White-bellied Sea Eagle are all resident, whilst Lesser Sand Plover *C. mongolus* and Greater Sand Plover *C. leschenaultii* are both regular in winter; in all, nineteen species of wader have been recorded.

Other winter visitors to the islands include von Schrenck's Bittern *Ixobrychus eurhythmus*, Grey-faced Buzzard *Butastur indicus*, Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*, Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*, Gray's Warbler *Locustella fasciolata*, Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* and Grey-streaked Flycatcher *Muscicapa griseisticta*.

Many passage migrants pass through Talaud and noteworthy species recorded to date include Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum*, Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus*, Pechora Pipit *Anthus gustavi* and Red-throated Pipit *A. cervinus*.

The waters around the islands can produce interesting seabird records, with Wilson's Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* and Black Noddy *A. minutus* seen in recent years.

Conservation

As members of Action Sampiri, the Sangihe and Talaud conservation project, the authors have been involved in developing conservation awareness amongst communities on Sangihe and Talaud. Visiting birdwatchers can make a positive contribution to these initiatives. For example, trying to explain to local people that you have travelled to the islands especially to see the unique and special birds found there may encourage people to protect birds for the next visitors. We would encourage birdwatchers to employ local guides or porters and pay good daily rates; Action Sampiri pay at least US\$5 per day. In this way some economic benefit is noticed by villagers on the island. All sites, particularly Gunung Sahengbalira, are very sensitive to disturbance. On Sahengbalira please keep to the existing trails, avoid clearing vegetation or lighting fires in the forest, and remove all rubbish.

Opportunities to make further discoveries about the islands' birds still remain. The authors will be working on Sangihe and Talaud through 1999 and early 2000 and would be happy to advise or assist any visitors to the islands, and grateful for any records sent to the address below.

Anyone wishing to see some of Indonesia's rarest species and enjoy a unique birding experience in a dramatic setting is well advised to head for the enigmatic islands of Sangihe and Talaud.

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Little-known Oriental non-bird

Intermediate Parakeet *Psittacula intermedia*



Introduction

The Intermediate Parakeet *Psittacula intermedia* was described by Rothschild¹ from a single dataless specimen showing characters between those of the Plum-headed Parakeet *P. cyanocephala* and Slaty-headed Parakeet *P. himalayana*. It has a yellow bill with an orange-red area on the upper mandible; pinkish-red bloom on the face fading into the blue-grey of the rest of the head, with a black chin and moustache curling into a narrow neck-line, below which a broad, bright, pale blue-green collar shades into yellow-green on the undersides and onto the back. The wing-coverts are mid-green with a vague bluish wash and a maroon patch on the scapulars. The tail is basally blue-green, shading to a richer royal blue along most of its length, with long yellow tips.

No sooner had Salvadori² opined that this specimen could be a hybrid than Rothschild acquired six more such birds, also dataless (although by plumage five, like the type, were male), and he reasserted his view that the species was valid;³ so, later, did Hartert.⁴ All the same, the only clue to the provenance of the birds was that they had been shipped from Bombay, and that other birds in the same consignment were from various parts of the Himalayas. Thus first the "Western Provinces" of India¹ and then some part of the Himalayas^{3,4} were proposed as the source. Later, Biswas⁵ misread "nat. skin" (i.e. native skin preparation) in Hartert's handwriting on a label and speculated that it meant "native of Sikkim"; so Sikkim has been cited in several works, including Ali and Ripley.⁶

Lack of a specified origin meant that no-one could go looking for the species, and by mid-century it had dropped from sight entirely, only resurfacing forty years ago in a rerun of Rothschild and Salvadori. Biswas⁵ looked at the entire series, since the 1930s in the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), and concluded that *intermedia* was valid; Husain⁷ examined a single specimen (on loan from AMNH) at the British Museum of Natural History (BMNH), and decided it was a hybrid *cyanocephala* X *himalayana*. After seeing the AMNH material Forshaw⁸ sided with Husain, but in the 1980s Walters⁹ discovered that the Marquess of

Tavistock¹⁰ had apparently cross-bred *cyanocephala* and *himalayana* without obtaining birds that looked like *intermedia*, and Sane *et al.*¹¹ purported to demonstrate biochemically that *intermedia* was a valid taxon. The conjunction of these revelations tipped the balance in favour of Intermediate Parakeet being a genuine lost species of the Indian subcontinent.

Both of us had a professional interest in this development — PCR because of her involvement in the preparation of a guide to the birds of India, NJC because, if *P. intermedia* was a species, it had to be listed as threatened¹² — so we decided to investigate jointly.

Variability of the specimens

Rothschild had assembled seven specimens (six now in AMNH, one in BMNH). Sane *et al.*¹¹ indicated that another had been donated to the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). So we started out knowing of eight published specimens. We quickly eliminated the Bombay bird, which proved, as did another unpublished specimen and a live bird in Mr Sane's possession (photographed in Wirth¹³), to show characters of both Plum-headed Parakeet and Rose-ringed Parakeet *P. krameri*, notably a broken orange-chestnut neck-ring!

Hartert¹⁴ had declared that if Rothschild's seven specimens were hybrid "one would expect them to vary, but they are all alike", but when we compared the BMNH bird with the AMNH series, we were struck at once by the fact that the Rothschild series is far from uniform (Figs. 1 and 2). Indeed, Biswas and Forshaw had thought one of Rothschild's birds, which he had considered a female *intermedia*, was an immature *P. himalayana*, and indeed nothing in Rothschild's bird distinguishes it from young *himalayana* labelled as such in AMNH; statistical analysis of our measurements confirm this.¹⁴

Moreover, the BMNH specimen is smaller, with a more turquoise tail colour and whitish tips, lacking the scapular patches of the AMNH birds (Fig. 3). Only the absent patches and its bill colour militate against its being a hybrid *cyanocephala* X Blossom-headed Parakeet *P. roseata*, but in any case it is clearly not "*intermedia*". (How this bird



- 1 The series on which *Psittacula intermedia* was based. Left-hand specimen (red label) is the type (1895), the remaining six date from 1907. Note (also in photo 2) the variability in plumage and preparation. The right-hand (greenest) specimen is a juvenile *P. himalayana*. Third from right is the specimen on permanent loan to BMNH. (Photo: P. C. Rasmussen)
- 2 Uppertails of the birds in Photo 1, in the same order. (Photo: P. C. Rasmussen)
- 3 The *P. intermedia* on permanent loan from AMNH to BMNH. It is not, however, a *P. cyanocephala* x *P. himalayana* (note the lack of a shoulder patch). (Photo: P. C. Rasmussen)
- 4 Captive "*P. intermedia*" in India, c. 1996. (Photo: R. Bhargava)
- 5 Captive "*P. intermedia*" in Austria, c. 1985. (Photo: F. Pfeffer)

led Husain to reach what we now know is the right conclusion — that *intermedia* is a *cynocephala* X *himalayana* cross — mystifies us completely!)

So already our eight specimens were reduced to five, and even these five show minor differences between them. The pale blue-green collar is highly variable in breadth and prominence, the bluish wash on the coverts has different intensities and extents, and the tail-tips vary in breadth and in their quantity of yellow.

Five truly “intermediate” specimens

Nevertheless, the five genuinely “intermediate” parakeets are striking precisely for their intermediacy. The coloration of the head and tail places them mid-way between the smallish Plum-head, with its dark crimson head and white-tipped tail, and the distinctly larger Slaty-head, with its dark grey head and bright yellow-tipped tail. Statistical analysis of some 40 measurements of each specimen, set against the same amount for 85 specimens representing the species of *Psittacnla* in the Indian subcontinent (i.e. almost 4,000 individual items of measurement!), confirmed that the five acceptable AMNH parakeets were also mensurally intermediate between Plum-heads and Slaty-heads. The Bombay specimen, as expected, showed mensural intermediacy between Plum-head and Rose-ring; so did Mr Sane’s other specimen.

Preparation styles and evidence of captivity in AMNH birds

Hartert claimed⁴ that if the specimens were hybrids they “would not very likely have come at the same time”, adding that the birds Rothschild obtained were “from a greater number” in the hands of a London plumassier. Later Biswas, in suggesting that a non-captive origin would support their status as a valid species, contended that “man-made hybrids” would have been cagebirds,⁵ but that “the character of their toes does not indicate this”.

Both arguments are flawed. First, at least one of Rothschild’s series — the type — had not come at the same time, but twelve years earlier; moreover, although they may have come to Rothschild at the same time, no-one can say if they did so to his London supplier. As for their captive origin, it hardly needs to be said that birds do not hybridise only when in cages (although we have little doubt that in this case they did), or that toes do not necessarily tell the full story. We examined

by hand and with x-rays the preparation styles of all the birds considered by Rothschild, Hartert and Biswas, and we checked each for signs of captivity.

In preparation style and materials the birds differ markedly — some with a stick, some not, some with cloth, some straw, some part-empty, etc. — although the immature *himalayana* is virtually identical to one *intermedia*. These two birds apart, the series of *intermedia* were probably prepared separately and possibly had different places of origin. Moreover, whatever the condition of their toes (and three specimens lack legs altogether!), six of the seven birds show one or more signs of captivity — broken primaries, lost tail feathers, irregular worn areas on the carpal region, frayed wing-coverts, featherless patches, and dirt on breast, belly, wing and tail — all consistent with being held captive prior to death.

Indian claims and context

Sane *et al.*¹¹ made several assumptions and errors in their account of his birds, including believing that the AMNH specimens were female, and that *intermedia* shows reversed sexual dimorphism whereby males lack scapular patches and females possess them. Having established that Sane’s birds are in any case hybrid *cynocephala* X *krameri*, we discount the results of the electrophoretic analyses, which purportedly show major differences between *intermedia* and other *Psittacnla* species; in any case, the analyses themselves used small samples and outdated methods, on which facts alone, irrespective of results, they would be open to question.

At the BirdLife Asia Conference in Coimbatore, India, in November 1996, R. Bhargava exhibited a photograph of a captive true *intermedia* (Fig. 4). He told us that such birds were occasionally found in trade within India (a point also made by Sane *et al.*¹¹), and that he had obtained five individuals from traders who claimed that they came from unspecified wild populations. His photograph of three preserved specimens suggests they are indistinguishable from the AMNH five. However, in February 1998 he called a press conference to release one of his captives, announcing that the species had been “rediscovered” and hoping that he would soon be able to find the wild population.¹⁵ Only later did we have the chance to show him our evidence that such birds are the product of captive cross-breeding.

India has, in fact, an extremely long tradition in keeping, training and breeding *Psittacula* parakeets. The birds used to be bred for the aristocracy, and mutations are much prized: *intermedia*-type birds reportedly cost one hundred times an ordinary *cycnocephala*,¹⁶ so captive breeding of such birds is clearly worth the trouble. Plum-heads and Slaty-heads are very largely parapatric, the former occupying the subcontinent lowlands to 1,300 m, the latter the Himalayan mid-altitudes above 1,300 m, so their natural hybridisation would, at best, be unexpected; and given their differences in size and coloration the likelihood of such a pairing is counterintuitive. The problems one breeder had in getting adult birds of the two species to pair (see below) backs this view.

Tavistock's hybrids

Meanwhile, we had to address the problem of Tavistock's failure to obtain *intermedia*-like birds when crossing *cycnocephala* and *himalayana*.⁹ However, it transpires that, although he bred at least seven individuals from this pairing, he only gave perfunctory accounts of two of them, and he never described them in adult plumage. As birds of the year they had white tail-tips, which indeed fails to match *intermedia*, but Tavistock¹⁰ also implied that this was in contrast to the tail-tip in Plum-heads, which is completely mistaken, and that the hybrids' tails were brighter blue than Plum-heads, which is scarcely conceivable if the other parent was the less intensely blue-tailed *himalayana*. These inconsistencies, and the fact that the birds were still juvenile when described, force us to discount the whole of Tavistock's account as unreliable evidence.

Other birds in published photographs

Herrmann¹⁷ captioned a photograph as a male *cycnocephala*, but it is a close match for the five "intermediate" AMNH birds. Inquiries revealed that this bird was said to have been wild-caught from an unknown locality, held in Austria around 1985 (Fig. 5), and later sold. A second male was located, again in Austria, in 1997 at the Turnersee Bird Park by Rosemary Low, and this was almost immediately published as a true *intermedia*, with no indication of origin or parentage, by Fuchs.¹⁸ Photos show it to be like the earlier Austrian bird but missing some toes and with a smaller-looking bill (Fig. 6). However, both birds have narrow central tail feathers, with long pale yellow tips

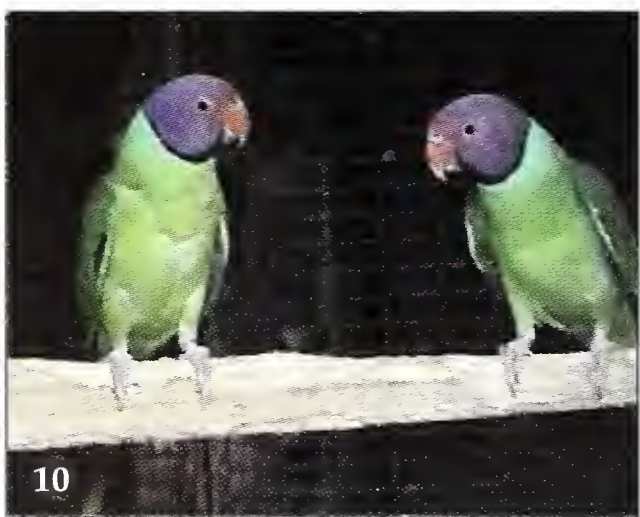
and pale shafts extending still further up the feathers, yellow-olive collars and bright yellowish-green underparts, so we think one of the parents was not *himalayana* but Grey-headed Parakeet *P. finschii*. In Rosemary Low's judgement the Turnersee bird was about the size of a *cycnocephala*, which again suggests *finschii* as a parent.

The discovery of living hybrids

Quite the best evidence we uncovered was entirely serendipitous. Several years earlier, Michael Walters, being known since 1985 for his interest in *intermedia*, had been contacted by a British aviculturist who claimed to have bred *intermedia* from the same parent species as Tavistock had used. Michael had jotted the name down for NJC, but the piece of paper languished in a file until after our investigations had yielded the above results. Belatedly the name of Melvin Sedgemore and his address near Wolverhampton, England, were found, and in August 1997 we paid him a visit.

After having read Biswas,⁵ Mel had set out to see for himself if *intermedia* could be bred from a male *cycnocephala* and a female *himalayana*. For several years in the late 1970s and early 1980s they showed little interest in each other. He tried a different pair in the same combination, but again they failed to bond. Then in 1991 he put together an immature male *cycnocephala* and an immature female *himalayana*, and these birds immediately showed bonding behaviour. After several attempts at breeding, in 1994 three eggs were laid, all of which hatched and survive today. In 1995 two out of three eggs hatched, and both these birds also still survive (Fig. 7). However, soon after the second successful brood the female died in the nest, and the male parent died in 1997. We examined photographs of these parents with their hybrid offspring, and confirm that both parents were normal representatives of their species.

By 1997 all five hybrids were in adult plumage, four male, one female. The female plumage is, of course, previously undescribed: she has a paler, duller head colour than adults of either sex *himalayana* or *finschii*, and lacks the narrow black collar; and from male *himalayana/finschii* she differs in having no maroon scapular patch. From adult female *cycnocephala* she is told by her drabber grey head, heavier upper mandible (strongly tinged orange at the base), a less yellow side-collar, and long, slightly broadened, pale yellow tail-tips (Fig. 8).



- 6 Captive "*P. intermedia*" in Austria, 1997. (Photo: R. Low)
- 7 Three of Mel Sedgemore's five hybrid *P. cyanocephala* x *P. himalayana* in 1995, when two birds hatched that year were still in juvenile plumage. (Photo: M. Sedgemore)
- 8 Female (hanging) and male "*P. intermedia*" belonging to M. Sedgemore, 1997.
- 9, 10 Views of Mel Sedgemore's male "*P. intermedia*", 1997.
- 11 Leo Critchley's "*P. intermedia*". (Photo: L. Critchley)

Photos 8, 9 and 10 are all video grabs, taken from a digital video camera by P. C. Rasmussen.

The male hybrids proved to be a complete match for the five "intermediate" birds in AMNH. All four had heads coloured as in the AMNH specimens, with only slight variability among them. The ceres were pale fleshy-horn; upper mandible orange-red on the basal two-thirds, with yellowish tips; lower mandibles pale; skin of eye-ring pale greyish; feet and claws pale greyish-pink. All had a broad pale greenish-blue collar; a bluish wash on the lesser coverts and rump; and slightly broadened and pale yellowish upper tail-tips (Figs. 9, 10).

A description of the juveniles had in fact been published, but in so modest a manner that hardly anyone noticed,¹⁹ but this had brought Sedgemore into contact with Leo Critchley, in Barrow-in-Furness, who had also successfully (albeit unintentionally) paired a male *cycnocephala* and a female *himalayana*. Mr Critchley told us that in 1988 he had been given a recently bereaved male bird, and soon afterwards he bought a solitary, very placid female *himalayana* which he put in a mixed aviary with his male Plum-head. In March 1989 they showed bonding behaviour, and around 1 April the female began a clutch of five eggs. These hatched on or soon after 25 April, and all five young left the nest after about three weeks. Four were sold to a pet shop, but one was kept to see how it developed. It proved to be a male, still alive in May 1998, and from the photographs (including one with both parents) we can see that the bird again exactly matches the AMNH intermediates and Mel Sedgemore's four males in every plumage detail (Fig. 11).

We were able to take several measurements from each of Mel's hybrids. Statistical analysis of these figures consistently groups them with the five AMNH intermediates: final proof that Lord Rothschild had, for a rare occasion in his great career, been mistaken in his judgement, and that Count Salvadori, not for the first time in his, had been right.

Acknowledgements

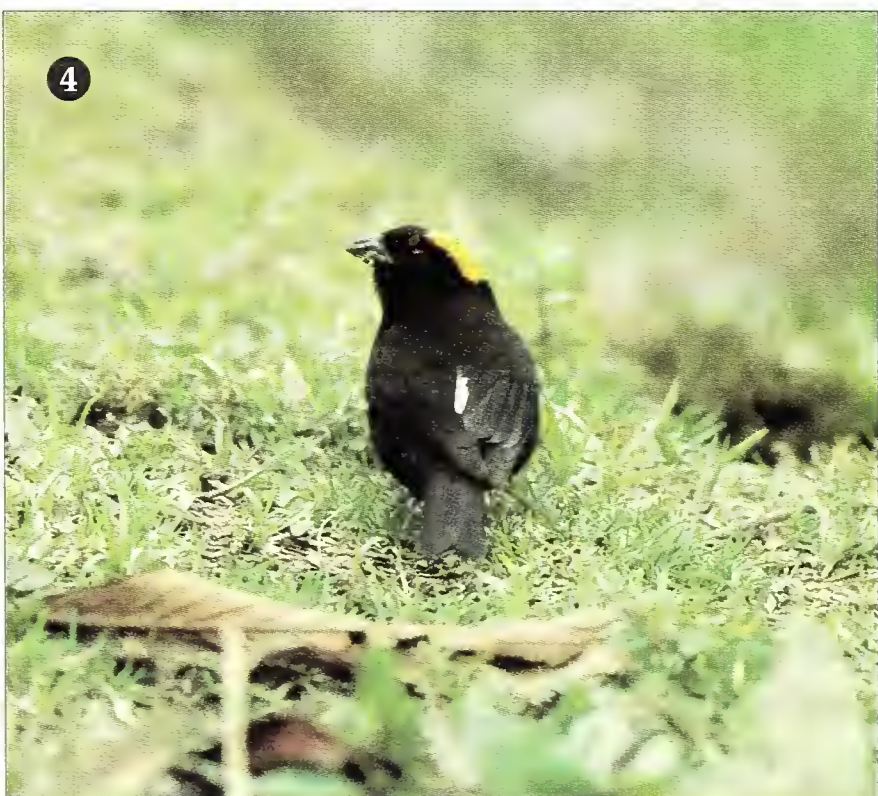
Rasmussen and Collar (in press) offer our thanks to many people for their help, but here we must mention Leo Critchley and in particular Melvin Sedgemore for their great kindness and help.

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(Captions for 1- 9 are on page 44)

The road between Ura and Limithang in eastern Bhutan

Bhutan, often referred to as "Shangri La", is surely a paradise on earth for those birders privileged enough to visit this tiny Himalayan kingdom. Encompassing an area of just 47,000 km² and tucked away in the moist, floristically rich eastern Himalayas, Bhutan has recently cracked its door ajar, permitting birders to sample some of its truly sumptuous avian delights. David Bishop reports.

I first explored Bhutan in 1994, and since then I have returned each spring, to lead bird tours for Victor Emanuel Nature Tours. The sheer unadulterated beauty and pristine nature of this country, with seemingly endless forests, draws one ever onward. The fascinating and relatively unaffected cultures and, perhaps above all, an opportunity to experience a small window into what the majority of the Himalayas must once have looked and sounded like, are just some of the factors that make Bhutan such a very special place.

Despite Bhutan's small size, over 600 species have been recorded from the Kingdom, including nearly 70 which have been added during the last ten years. And what fun it has been to be one of the few to visit the country and document some of these additions. Several other species may eventually be found, including such sought-after "myths" as Wedge-billed Wren Babbler *Sphenocichla humei* and Rufous-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx hyperythra*. Of Bhutan's 614 species,

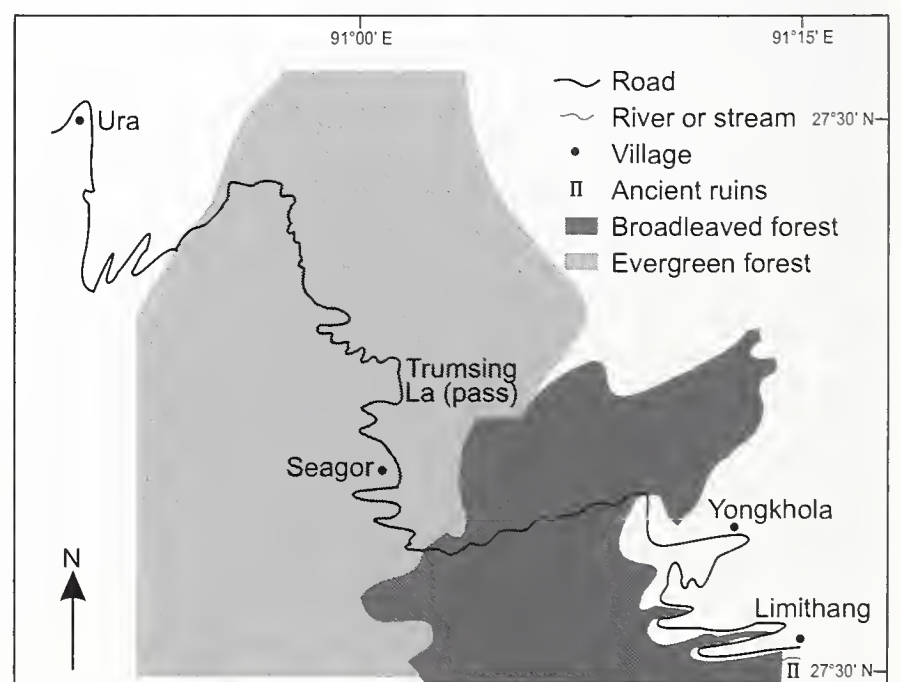
16 are listed as Threatened and 31 Near-threatened by Collar *et al.*¹ and Bhutan is one of the best places to see some of them. Although the country does not host any endemic species of its own, it lies within the Eastern Himalayas Endemic Bird Area (as classified by BirdLife International) and harbours at least 12 "Restricted Range" species.

Bhutan may be small, but within its borders is an extraordinary range of habitats: from some of the Himalaya's most extensive and least disturbed subtropical forests, upwards through truly exquisite warm and, at higher elevations, cool broadleaved forests to towering evergreen forests of fir, hemlock and spruce. The Eastern Himalayas are notably moister and much warmer than areas further to the west and, as a consequence, the tree-line occurs at a much higher elevation; *c.* 4,250 m *vs c.* 3,330 m. Above the tree-line are extensive alpine pastures which from late spring to early autumn present one of the great botanical spectacles on our planet.

The entire country is bisected by a well-maintained paved road, permitting relatively easy access to habitats from 150 to 3,750 m. This extraordinary feat of engineering extends northwards from Phuntsholing in the south-west, on the border with India's Jalpaiguri district, to

Captions for colour plates on pages 42 and 43.

1. Female Collared Grosbeak *Mycerobas affinis* (Photo: Tim Loseby)
2. Male Dark-rumped Rosefinch *Carpodacus edwardsii* (Photo: Ron Huffman)
3. Drongo Cuckoo *Surniculus lugubris* (Photo: Tim Loseby)
4. Gold-naped Finch *Pyrrhoplectes epauletta* (Photo: Tim Loseby)
5. Fork-tailed Swift *Apus pacificus* (Photo: Tim Loseby)
6. Spotted Laughingthrush *Garrulax ocellatus* (Photo: Tim Loseby)
7. Conifer forest at 3,750 m at Thrumsing La pass, with the Himalayas in the background (Photo: K. David Bishop)
8. Female Crimson-browed Finch *Propyrrhula subhimachala* (Photo: Ron Huffman)
9. White-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax albogularis* (Photo: Tim Loseby)



Map showing the Limithang Road in eastern Bhutan

Paro and Thimphu. There the road turns eastwards at a mid-point in the country over a series of high passes *via* the fortified town of Tongsa, with its spectacular hanging Dzong, to the relatively highly populated town of Tashigang. The route continues south past the university town of Sherubtse and descends the Himalayas in a series of breathtakingly dizzy slopes to the border town of Somdrup Jonkhar and, once again, the plain of the Brahmaputra valley (see Map). One of the features of Bhutan is that birding, especially in mid to late spring (late March to mid-May), is good virtually anywhere below 3,030 m. Unlike many parts of Asia one is not obliged to seek out a park or reserve or remnant patch of "good-looking" habitat, since any stop, even in the midst of farmland, can produce exciting birds. Notwithstanding, the mixed broadleaved forests are much richer, and therefore more exciting, than the rather slow-going monotypic stands of blue pine and, particularly, chir pine. Clearly the former is the habitat upon which to focus one's efforts.

Fortunately the very best and most accessible area of mixed broadleaved forest can be found along the road between Ura and Limithang (henceforth referred to as the Limithang Road) in eastern Bhutan. This, in my opinion, is one of the most exciting birding sites in Asia! From Thrumsing La (= pass) at 3,750 m the Limithang Road descends through a seemingly unending series of loops and switch-backs that take one through some of the most awe-inspiring, forest-clad slopes to be found anywhere in the Himalayas. Driving here is not for the faint-hearted and the Namling "Death Drop" has to be witnessed to be believed! This incredible road presents an unparalleled opportunity to bird what would otherwise be impossibly steep slopes. Fortunately, nearly the entire stretch of road and its surrounding forests are incorporated in the Thrumsing La National Park.

Approximately 240 species of birds have been recorded along the road and it is likely that many more species will be added to this list as more birders visit the area and visits are undertaken at different times of the year. To date observations cover the months of late February to mid-June with one visit in October.

Ura *via* Thrumsing La to Sengor (altitude 3,100–3,760–3,050 m)

Leaving behind the relatively dry Ura Valley, one ascends through forests of gigantic firs, often with

an understorey of rhododendron. The road for a few kilometres is precipitous in the extreme, with steep drops that reveal a landscape defying description, until the pass at Thrumsing La is finally reached. The urge to press on quickly to Thrumsing La should be contained as the forests along this section of the road hold much promise but are rarely worked. In early spring they are often partially blanketed in snow. Consequently, spotting coveys of the striking and, here, relatively confiding Blood Pheasant *Ithaginis cruentus* is fairly easy. Occasionally Wallcreepers *Tichodroma muraria* shuffle across a rock face or fly out over the void, displaying their unmistakable flight pattern. Look too for accentors foraging at the side of the road, especially Alpine *Prunella collaris*, Altai *P. himalayana* and occasionally Robin Accentors *P. rubeculoides*. Spotted Nutcrackers *Nucifraga caryocatactes* are constant companions in these forests but the spectacular Collared Grosbeak *Mycerobas affinis* is much less predictable. Sometimes they are seemingly absent whilst at other times they occur in great gold-and-black flocks.

From Bhutan's highest road-pass the road descends to the village of Sengor which, on clear days, can be seen through the trees, a tiny settlement of shingle roofs and lush fields. But don't rush! This is home to one of these mountains' most special birds, the Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*. Much less confiding than the Blood Pheasant they are nevertheless seen regularly here, quietly digging for tubers in the patches left by melted snow. Sibilant chattering notes will attract your attention and lead you to your first mixed tit flock. A major feature of these high-elevation forests, the flocks contain as many as five species of tits including Rufous-vented *Parus rubidiventris*, Coal *P. ater*, Grey-crested *P. dichrous*, Green-backed *P. monticolus* and, only occasionally in such a rarified atmosphere, Yellow-browed Tits *Sylviparus modestus*. Such activity draws a number of travelling companions, including White-browed Fulvettas *Alcippe vinipectus*, Ashy-throated *Phylloscopus maculipennis* and Lemon-rumped Warblers *P. chloronotus* and Green-tailed Sunbirds *Aethopyga nipalensis*. With luck one of these flocks may include a stunning male Fire-tailed Sunbird *A. ignicauda*. Emerging into the welcome sunlight that Sengor brings, look out for rock-strewn fields for they are not what they seem: flocks of up to 100 handsome Snow Pigeons *Columba leuconota* regularly feed here. If you are lucky you may also

find them roosting under an overhanging cliff along the road, just below the village.

Sengor to the Namling "Death Drop" (altitude 3,050–2,400 m)

Before continuing on, stop in Sengor for a cup of traditional *suja*, a concoction of tea, butter-milk and salt. Just witnessing the way it is made is an event in itself!

Several switch-backs below Sengor bring you to an ideal campsite, set in the last open field worthy of the name, well before the bottom of the valley is reached which is still many hours driving away. With views of seemingly endless ridges of untouched forests, lit up by flowering magnolias and rhododendrons and entranced by bird song, this is truly *the* place to spend the night. The hills reverberate to the calls of hill partridges *Arborophila* spp. and Oriental Skylarks *Alda gulula*. Just a switch-back up the road and with luck, you should find a pair of Spotted Laughingthrushes *Garrulax ocellatus*. A pair of these stunning birds has been present at this spot every year that I have visited Bhutan.

The little known Bar-winged Wren Babbler *Spelaornis troglodytoides*, an attractive bamboo specialist, only occurs at high elevations, just below Sengor. Despite its distinctive song this is the only site in Bhutan at which I have encountered this species. Check the bamboo-covered, almost vertical, rock faces alongside the road c. 1 km below Sengor as at least four pairs are in residence here. Other mouth-watering species you may encounter include: Satyr Tragopan *Tragopan satyra*; Crimson-breasted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos cathpharius* — a moderately common resident; Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler *Xiphirhynchus superciliosus*; Fire-tailed Myzornis *Myzornis pyrrhura* — one of the most desirable of the Himalayan specialties, it seems to be nowhere common throughout its range, although the upper elevations of this road appear to be a more reliable site than most. Just walking this road, with its ever-unfolding vistas of forest waiting to be explored, and dramatic lighting patterns as great shafts of sunlight rupture passing storm clouds, leaves an indelible image on the memory.

Namling to Yongkhala Camp (altitude 2,400–1,500 m)

Wandering through the luxuriant warm broad-leaved forests that characterise this section of the

Limithang Road is to enter a fairy-tale land. Mighty boughs are encrusted with daintily flowered orchids and the trees literally drool with a bizarre array of epiphytes — mosses, lichens, liverworts and filigree ferns help to conceal a seemingly endless array of avian gems. This is the home, *par excellence*, of such rare and little-known species as: Chestnut-breasted Partridge *Arborophila mandellii* — recently discovered just above the campsite at Yongkhala; Satyr Tragopan — surprisingly, apparently uncommon here although it may overlap with the little-known Blyth's Tragopan *Tragopan blythii* at lower elevations; Yellow-rumped Honeyguide *Indicator xanthonotus*; the quite stunning Ward's Trogon *Harpactes wardi* — seen by the author on the first VENT tour to the Kingdom in 1994, the first record since the 1960s; Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis* — this magnificent but sadly threatened species is moderately common from 1,600 to 2,200 m, but, unlike elsewhere within its range, it has never been hunted in these woodlands and, as a consequence, it is notably confiding — on one occasion a pair flew in, perched overhead and then peered inquisitively at us as we leisurely ate our breakfast!

Depending on the prevailing temperature, each year these hills resound to the persistent but evocative songs of 6–7 species of cuckoo: Large Hawk *Hierococcyx sparveroides*, Hodgson's Hawk *H. fugax*, Indian *Cuculus micropterus*, Eurasian *C. canorus*, Oriental *C. saturatus*, Lesser *C. poliocephalus* and Drongo *Surniculus lugubris* Cuckoos. A great opportunity to learn the calls of these species and how to differentiate between them! Occasionally, one encounters large groups of swifts zooming low at canopy level, permitting excellent views of Himalayan Swiftlets *Collocalia brevirostris*, White-throated Needletails *Hirundapus caudacutus* and Fork-tailed Swifts *Apus pacificus*. Speckled Wood Pigeons *Columba hodgsonii* and Wedge-tailed Green Pigeons *Treron sphenura* are circumspect and easy to overlook, whereas Blue-capped *Monticola cinclorhynchus* and Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrushes *M. rufiventris* are quite splendidly unmissable. Lesser Brachypteryx *leucophrys* and White-browed *B. montana* Shortwings, Little Pied *Ficedula westermanni*, Ultramarine *F. superciliosus*, Pygmy Blue *Muscicapella hodgsoni* Flycatchers, and, with a great deal of luck, the exquisite Sapphire Flycatcher *Ficedula sapphira*; bush robins *Tarsiger* spp.; redstarts *Phoenicurus* spp.; the rare Blue-fronted Robin *Cinclidium frontale*; Purple Cochoa

Cochoa purpurea; Sultan Tit *Melanochlora sultanea*; nesting Nepal House Martins *Delichon nipalensis*; all three tesias — the delightful Chestnut-headed Tesia *Tesia castaneocoronata* can actually be easy to see right along the roadside; at least four species of bush warbler, of which Grey-sided Bush Warbler *Cettia brunnifrons* appears to be by far the commonest, are all to be found along this stretch of the roadside.

Above all things though, this road is an especially wonderful place for babblers. To date a total of c. 50 species has been recorded including: a dozen laughingthrushes — Grey-sided Laughingthrush *Garrulax caerulatus* being of special note; Red-faced Liocichla *Liocichla phoenicea*; four scimitar babblers including the peculiar bamboo-dwelling Slender-billed Scimitar Babbler *Xiphirhynchus superciliaris* and the striking but difficult to observe Coral-billed Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus ferruginosus*; five wren babblers including all three species of *Spelaornis* so far recorded from Bhutan. Midway down this section of the road, with much diligence, it is possible to find one or two pairs of the threatened Rufous-throated Wren Babbler *Spelaornis caudatus*. This extreme skulker appears to favour dense scrub on very steep hillsides, within forest and near small streams. Other species in this section include Cutia *Cutia nipalensis*; the rare Black-headed Shrike Babbler *Pteruthius rufiventer*; Golden-breasted *Alcippe chrysotis* and Yellow-throated *Fulvettas A. cinerea*; seven yuhinas including the uncommon White-naped Yuhina *Yuhina bakeri*; at least four parrotbills including such rarities as Great *Conostoma oemodim* and Greater *Paradoxornis ruficeps* and Lesser Rufous-headed *P. atrosuperciliaris* Parrotbills. And surely that gem of gems the Long-billed Wren Babbler *Rimator malacoptilus* must lurk somewhere here?

Encounters with cardueline finches are few and far between, probably because most if not all species encountered are just moving through, refueling *en route* to their breeding grounds at higher elevations. Occasionally one's breath will be taken away as binoculars stray upon a tree lit up like a Roman candle with Scarlet Finches *Haematoxipiza sipahi*. Now and then one bumps into one of the rosefinches (Dark-breasted *Carpodacus nipalensis*, Dark-rumped *C. edwardsii* and Crimson-browed *Propyrrhula subhimachala*) quietly foraging in a dank, bramble-covered gully. As anyone who knows Asian birds will attest, identifying even the sumptuous-looking males is a challenge. All three species of bullfinch,

including the uncommon Grey-headed Bullfinch *Pyrrhula erythaca*, can be found from time to time as can that very special prize, the Gold-naped Finch *Pyrrhoplectes epauletta*.

Yongkhala to Limithang (altitude 1,500–700 m)

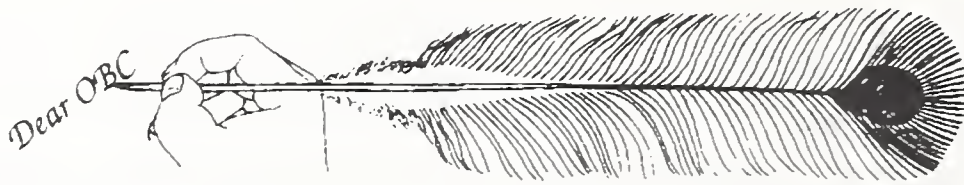
The forests below Yongkhala comprise a mosaic of traditional farmlands, relatively dry woodland, scrub and subtropical forest. Although somewhat more disturbed than habitats at higher elevations, these lower-elevation habitats support numerous species that are rarely, if ever, encountered above Yongkhala: Speckled Piculet *Picumnus innominatus*; Red-headed Trogon *Harpactes erythrocephalus*; Blue-bearded Bee-eater *Nyctyornis athertoni*; Blue-throated Flycatcher *Cyornis rubeculoides*; White-crested Laughingthrush *Garrulax leucolophus*; Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch *Sitta castanea* and White-rumped Munia *Louchura striata*. Occasionally mixed flocks of Spot-winged *Mycerobas melanozanthos* and White-winged Grosbeaks *M. caruipes* gather to feed in fruiting trees, a spectacular sight against the backdrop of the forest-clad slopes of the area.

The narrow Shongkar Chu Valley, bisected by a wild, tumbling stream and surrounded by a patchwork of grazing meadows and terraced fields, delimits the bottom of the Limithang road. Very quickly the road that follows this stream enters increasingly drier, more austere terrain dominated by chir pine. On my first visit to Bhutan I camped alongside the Shongkar Chu, awakening to the incantations of farmers as they prepared prayer flags and a vociferous flock of spectacular Green Magpies *Cissa chinensis*. White-crested and White-throated Laughingthrushes *Garrulax albogularis* babbled, countered by the piercing songs of male Plumbeous Redstarts *Rhyacornis fuliginosus* staking out their linear territories. All was brought to an instant hush as the shadow of a Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis* swept by. The evening before, a Black-tailed Crake *Porzana bicolor* had scuttled across my path as we arrived, presaging the unending excitement of birding the Limithang Road. I cannot wait to return.

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To the Editor



Feeding Behaviour of Aleutian Terns off Tanjung Balai, Indonesia

The identification of Aleutian Terns *Sterna aleutica*, based on plumage, bare parts, structure and call was recently published by Kennerley and Ollington.¹ However, their article makes no mention of the feeding behaviour of Aleutian Terns.

On a morning visit to Tanjung Balai, Grand Karimun, on 11th April 1998 we observed up to 30 Aleutian Terns (mainly in summer plumage) feeding close inshore. During the observation period of around three hours the species's feeding behaviour remained constant and did not resemble that of other *Sterna* terns with which we are familiar.

The birds formed loose flocks of up to 18 individuals. Each bird regularly patrolled back and forth along a line of approximately 80 m, at a height of around 8 m, typically with a leisurely flight action. An individual would suddenly "stutter", rising a little, before slowly dropping down to rest on the sea where it would peck from the surface of the water. On several occasions the birds would almost spin on the sea, somewhat recalling the feeding behaviour of a phalarope *Phalaropus* spp. or the feeding behaviour occasionally employed by Black-headed Gulls *Larus ridibundus*. Often the terns would sit on the water for up to a minute before flying a short distance and repeating the behaviour. During the observation period we never saw Aleutian Terns hovering or plunge-diving into the sea, although on many occasions they were seen to dip and pick from the surface of the water whilst in flight, reminiscent of a marsh tern *Chlidonias* spp. or the technique occasionally used by Common Terns.²

Our observations are based on a sole encounter with Aleutian Terns and they may not be typical for the species. However, there is so little information available on this topic — Harrison³ states the feeding techniques are not described, whilst Cramp² makes no mention of them — that we feel our observations may be of interest to many observers. Certainly we have never encountered other *Sterna* terns feeding in this manner before.

Kennerley and Ollington¹ speculate that the attraction of Karimun to Aleutian Terns may be the water depth. On both our arrival and departure from the inshore waters of the island we noted several areas of brown-stained water (presumably the result of upwelling currents) — perhaps this is the attraction to the terns and possibly it explains their feeding behaviour at this site.

Acknowledgement

We thank Richard Thomas for supplying us with a copy of "Aleutian Terns in South-East Asia" just prior to its publication in the June 1998 OBC Bulletin.

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Compiled by Joe Tobias



CAMBODIA

Waterbird counting and survey at Prek Toal and Boeng Chhma/Moat Khla by Frédéric Goes (P.O. Box 972, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Email: lotus@worldmail.com.kh) et al. Reports on 1998 fieldwork at the vitally important Tonle Sap waterbird colonies, giving counts of species, description of sites and an overview of threats.

Waterbird conservation in the Prek Toal area, Battambang Province, Cambodia by Haidy Ear-Dupuy (International Crane Foundation/Wetlands International – Cambodia and Mekong Programme) et al. A socio-economic appraisal of threats and consequent recommendations relevant to the Tonle Sap waterbird colonies.

CHINA

Studies on habitats of Elliot's Pheasant by Ding Ping (Department of Biology, College of Life science, Hangzhou University, Zhejiang 310012, China) et al. *Tragopan* 8: 7–8. Detailed descriptions of the habits and habitats of this species in Guizhou, Fujian, Jiangxi and Zhejiang provinces along with notes on its conservation.

The distributional range of brown-eared pheasant *Crossoptilon mantchuricum* by Zhang Zhengwang (Department of Biology, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China; Email: zzw@email.bnu.edu.cn). *Tragopan* 9: 5–7. Presents the historical and current known ranges of this endemic species.

INDIA

Avifauna of the Anaimalai Hills (Western Ghats) of Southern India by Ragupathy Kannan, Department of Biology, Westark College, P.O. Box 3649, Fort Smith, Arkansas 72913, USA. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist Soc.* 95: 193–214. Ornithological records from the Anaimalai Hills covering a two-year period are presented. A total of 218 species was recorded, including 12 Western Ghat endemics. Free reprints are available from the author at the above address.

A new Scops Owl from Great Nicobar Island by Pamela Rasmussen (Room 336, NHB MRC 114, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560-0131, USA). *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club* 118: 141–153. Contains diagnosis of Nicobar Scops Owl *Otus alius* from two specimens collected in 1966 and 1977 and a discussion of its relation to other members of the *Otus manadensis* superspecies.

The breeding ecology and conservation of the Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis* in Ladakh, India by Otto Pfister (c/o O. Pfister, Chaserweg 22, 8302 Kloten, Switzerland). Results of an in-depth study following the breeding attempts of the small Indian population of this rare crane and providing a detailed synopsis of its ecology, behaviour and conservation.

Nesting of Blyth's Tragopan by Dipankar Ghose (WPA South Asia, c/o WWF-India Secretariat, 172 B Lodi Estate, New Delhi 110003, India). *Tragopan* 8: 9. Presents information gathered at a nest in Mizoram state, the first described in the wild.

Occurrence of a probable new pheasant taxon in Arunachal Pradesh, India by Suresh Kumar (Wildlife Institute of India, P.O. Box 18, Chandrabani, Dehradun 248001, India). *Tragopan* 9: 11–12. On the basis of tail-feathers of a *Lophophorus* sp., the existence of a new taxon, possibly a subspecies of Sclater's Monal *L. sclateri*, is suggested.

Major specimen fraud in the Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux (Athene auct.) blewetti* by Pamela Rasmussen (Rm. 336 NHB MRC 114, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560, USA. Email: rasmussen.pamela@nmnh.si.edu) and Nigel Collar. *Ibis* 141: 11–21. Detective work revealed that Meinertzhagen stole a specimen of the species collected in Maharashtra by Davidson and relabelled it as coming from Gujarat. The distribution of the species is re-assessed accordingly.

INDONESIA

A new Scops Owl from Sangihe Island, Indonesia by Frank Lambert (BirdLife International, P.O. Box 310/Boo, Bogor 16003, Indonesia) and

Pamela Rasmussen. Bull. Brit. Orn. Club 118: 204–217. Although previously regarded as undifferentiated from *Otus manadensis*, the Sangihe Scops Owl *Otus collari* has now been given specific status on the basis of significant vocal and morphological differences.

The identity of *Eos histrio challengerii* Salvadori 1891 by Jon Riley (1 The Croft, North Sunderland, Seahouses, Northumberland, NE68 7XA, UK) et al., *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club 118: 193–196.* Suggests this race of the endemic Red-and-blue Lory of the Sangihe and Talaud islands is invalid.

Biological surveys and conservation priorities on the Sangihe and Talaud islands, Indonesia: the final report of Action Sampiri 1995–1997 by J. Riley (1997), Cambridge, UK: CSB Conservation Publications. ISBN 1 901399 03 6. Final report of Action Sampiri, which made biological and socio-economic surveys in the islands north of Sulawesi, Indonesia, from 1995–1997. This report provides a much-needed assessment of avian biodiversity on these very important islands and includes new information on the Red-and-blue Lory *Eos histrio* and the Sangihe Shrike-thrush *Colluricincla (megarhyncha) sanghirensis*.

Biological surveys and conservation priorities in north-east Seram, Maluku, Indonesia by I. S. Isherwood et al. (1997) Cambridge, UK: CSB Conservation Publications. ISBN 1 901399 02 8. Provides the first published assessment of the status of the threatened birds and forests of north-east Seram, one of the most important islands in Maluku province, Indonesia. Important populations of two threatened endemic parrot species were discovered, emphasising the need for Seram to be accorded protected areas other than the well-known Manusela National Park. Several sections are translated into Bahasa Indonesia.

JAPAN

Feeding-station use of wintering Japanese Cranes *Grus japonensis* in eastern Hokkaido in relation to age and social status by Doug-yu Hu (Graduate School of Environmental Earth Science, Hokkaido University, Sapporo 060-0810, Japan) et al. *Japanese Journal of Ornithology 46: 163–174.* The importance of feeding-stations for the species, and particularly for younger birds, is outlined along with other information about pairing, calling and foraging area selection.

The breeding biology of the Black Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone atrocaudata* by Taku Mizuta (Department of Zoology, Graduate School of Science, Kyoto University, Kitasirakawa-Oiwakecho, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto 606-8502, Japan). *Japanese Journal of Ornithology, 47: 25–28.* Details of breeding ecology and behaviour, and a comparison between the success of long-tailed and short-tailed birds.

NEPAL

Hodgson's Bushchat *Saxicola insignis* Gray and Gray 1864 in Nepal by Hem Sagar Baral (Bird Conservation Nepal, P.O. Box 12465, Kanialadi, Kathmandu). Lists all records of the species in Nepal up to 1998, describes its winter ecology in detail and discusses appropriate conservation measures.

SRI LANKA

A conservation review of three wet zone forests in south-west Sri Lanka. Final report of Sinharaja '97 by J. P. G. Jones et al. (1998), Cambridge, UK: CSB Conservation Publications. ISBN 1 901399 04 4. Provides the first detailed biological surveys of wet zone forests away from the Sinharaja National Wilderness Area. The authors assess the biological significance of three of the most important forests in Sri Lanka: Delwala, Walankanda and Kudumiriya. The lavishly illustrated report includes extensive commentaries on the country's threatened and endemic avifauna and surveys of mammals and herpetofauna.

VIETNAM

New species of Barwing *Actinodura* (Passeriformes: Sylviinae: Timaliini) from the Western Highlands of Vietnam by Jonathan Eames (BirdLife International Vietnam Programme, 293B Tay Son, Dong Da, Hanoi, Vietnam) et al. *Ibis 141: 1–10.* Describes a distinct new species that is currently known from the Ngoc Linh area of Vietnam and the Dakchung Plateau of adjacent Laos and provides taxonomic, behavioural and ecological details.

Is the Imperial Pheasant *Lophura imperialis* a hybrid? Work in progress and a call for information by Pamela Rasmussen (Room 336 NHB MRC 114, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

20560, USA). **Tragopan 9: 8–10.** Re-examination of museum material and historical evidence suggests that this enigmatic species might after all be the result of hybridisation between Edwards's Pheasant *L. edwardsi* and Silver Pheasant *L. nycthemera annamensis*.

GENERAL

Common Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* by R. Kannan and D. A. James in *The Birds of North America*, No 377 eds. A. Poole and F. Gill, The Birds of North America Inc., Philadelphia, PA, USA. A monograph of this introduced exotic species in North America, including a thorough review of what is

known of its biology in both the New and Old Worlds. Free reprints are available from Dr R. Kannan, Dept. Biology, Westark College, Fort Smith, AR 72913, USA. Email rkannan@systema.westark.edu

CSB CONSERVATION REPORTS

The above three reports by Jones, Riley and Isherwood are published by CSB Conservation Publications, a non-profit publisher that provides reliable and up-to-date assessments of threatened habitats and wildlife across the globe. Copies are available from NHBS Ltd, 2-3 Wills Road, Totnes, Devon TQ9 5XN, UK, email orders@nhbs.co.uk



From the Field

Compiled by Craig Robson

These are largely unconfirmed records covering the period from March 1998–February 1999. We urge contributors to provide full details to the relevant regional organisations if they have not already done so.

CHINA

Five new species were recorded from Xinjiang Province last autumn (GC): **Falcated Duck** *Anas falcata* and **Long-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* (the first inland record in China) at Ba Chu on 28th September, **Red-necked Stint** *Calidris ruficollis* at Ta Zhong in the middle of the Taklamakan Desert on 23rd September, **Heuglin's Gull** *Larus heuglini* at Qing Ge Da Reservoir, near Urumqi, on 9th October and **Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala* also at Ta Zhong on 22nd September. Observations during a visit to Happy Island, near Beidaihe, Hebei, in September (JH,DW,WM,RT) included remarkable totals of 1,750 **Grey-headed Lapwings** *Vanellus cinereus* and 315 **Relict Gulls** *L. relictus*. China's first **Sociable Lapwing** *Vanellus gregarius* was seen tagging along with the former, while a single **Red-headed Bunting** *E. bruniceps* (RT,DW) was the first from Hebei. Two juvenile **Long-billed Dowitchers** were seen at Qilihai, c. 40 km south of Beidaihe, Hebei, on 5th October (PHo *et al.*/Sunbird).

INDIA

At Harike Bird Sanctuary, Punjab (PU), autumn passage produced two new state records: two **Large-billed Leaf Warblers** *Phylloscopus magnirostris* on 24th–25th September and a single **Greater Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* on 27th September. Other rarities during the autumn included three **Sanderlings** *Calidris alba* on 22nd September, a single **Scaly Thrush** *Zoothera dauma* on 24th–26th October, a male **Kashmir Flycatcher** *Ficedula subrubra* on 24th September, ten **Himalayan Bulbuls** *Pycnonotus leucogenys* on both 25th–26th September and 21st–22nd November, a single **Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler** *Cettia fortipes* on 22nd November, single **Dusky Warblers** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* on 24th–26th October and 21st November, a single **Lemon-rumped Warbler** *P. chloronotus* on 21st November (the first for the sanctuary), good numbers of **Hume's Short-toed Larks** *Calandrella acutirostris*, with at least 30 on 23rd–27th September and 150 on 25th October (commoner than **Greater Short-toed Lark** *C. brachydactyla*)

and a single **Red-throated Pipit** *Anthus cervinus* on 21st November. Seven **Himalayan Bulbuls** were also seen at Giddar, 10 km east of Harike BS on 25th October (PU) and a single **Thick-billed Warbler** *Acrocephalus aedon* was found at Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh on 31st October (PU). Further east, a singing **Nepal Wren Babbler** *Pnoepyga immaculata* was seen and another two heard by the Kosi river near Quality Inn, next to Corbett National Park, Uttar Pradesh, on 21st–22nd November (CR/Birdquest) and another was heard briefly near the entrance to Corbett NP on 24th November (CR/Birdquest); the first records of this restricted-range species from India. In Rajasthan, a single **Slaty-blue Flycatcher** *Ficedula tricolor* was found at Keoladeo National Park (Bharatpur) on 1st December (SL,CR/Birdquest) and there was a single **Grey Bushchat** *Saxicola ferrea* at Ranthambhore National Park on 3rd December (CR/Birdquest). Nearby, a flock of about 120 **Dalmatian Pelicans** *Pelecanus crispus* at Suriwal Lake, near Sawai Modhopur, on 3rd December (CR/Birdquest) was encouraging. A single **Red-throated Pipit** was seen at Okhla, Delhi, on 5th December (CR/Birdquest). In the north-east, interesting sightings in Kanchengunga National Park, Sikkim (ND), included a male **Merlin** *Falco columbarius* at Dzongri on 8th October and about eight **Mistle Thrushes** *Turdus viscivorus* at Tsokha on 12th October. Two **Ashy Minivets** *Pericrocotus divaricatus* at Balpakram National Park, south Garo Hills, on 3rd November (ND) were apparently the first from NE India. Interesting records (from a geographical point of view) in Nameri National Park, north of Tezpur, Assam (ND), included about five **Black-breasted Thrushes** *T. dissimilis* on 25th November, a single **Spotted Bush Warbler** *Bradypterus thoracicus* and a singing **Russet Bush Warbler** *B. seebahmi* on 27th November and three **Red-throated Pipits** on 25th November. A single **Red-necked Falcon** *Falco chicquera* was seen at Digboi, east Assam, on 13th November (ND) and there was a male **Montagu's Harrier** *Circus pygargus* near Sibsagar, east Assam, on 21st November (ND). Unusual reports from Namdapha National Park, east Arunachal Pradesh, included a male **Mrs Hume's Pheasant** *Symaticus humiae* on 15th December (DJ), a single **White-bellied Heron** *Ardea insignis* on 15th December (ND), a single **Rufous-bellied Eagle** *Hieraaetus kienerii* on 12th December (ND), a party of **Yellow-throated Laughingthrushes** *Garrulax galbanus* (well to the north of the documented

range) on 14th December (RH) and three different **White-tailed Flycatchers** *Cyornis concretus* (all below 300 m elevation) during 9th–16th December (ND). At least 36 **Greater Adjutants** *Leptoptilos dubius* were seen at Guahati Market (Ulubari Bazar) on 17th April (HB,MB) and there were still 32 there on 9th November (PU). Also of interest were two **Finn's Weavers** *Ploceus megarhynchus* at Kaziranga National Park on 18th April (HB,MB).

INDONESIA

Flores

A number of interesting observations were made during a joint BirdLife International/WWF survey, from 16th August to 25th October (RD,CT,DLe,WP). Three new species were recorded for the island: a first winter **Red-necked Stint** *Calidris ruficollis* at Tambak Koliaduk fish ponds, near Maumere, E Flores, on 4th September, a first winter **Great Knot** *C. tenuirostris* at the same locality on 20th September and a single **Grey-streaked Flycatcher** *Muscicapa griseisticta* at Paku, Tanjung Kerita, Mese, W Flores, on 8th October. Also in E Flores, was a single **Rose-crowned Fruit Dove** *Ptilinopus regina* at Mausambe on 3rd September and another two at Patiaku on 6th September; perhaps the first records since 1899. Other noteworthy records included at least ten **Hardheads** *Aythya australis* at Tiwu Bowu on 28th August (third Wallacean record), about five **Gould's Bronze Cuckoos** *Chrysococcyx russatus* at Mausambe on 30th August–3rd September, at least 15 **Yellow-crested Cockatoos** *Cacatua sulphurea* at Watubuku, E Flores, a total of at least 50 migrating **Oriental Honey-buzzards** *Pernis ptilorhynchus* during the first three weeks of October and **Grey-headed Canary Flycatchers** *Culicicapa ceylonensis* at Gunung Egon and Ili Wengot, E Flores (previously recorded only from W Flores). **Spectacled Monarch** *Monarcha trivirgatus*, previously recorded only from W Flores, was found at 750–850 m elevation at sites in C and E Flores. A single **Red-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon rubicauda* was seen from the Flores (Labuan Bajo) to Sumba (Waingapu) ferry on 26th October (RD).

Halmahera

A single **White-throated Needletail** *Hirundapus caudacutus* at Tanah Batu Putih on 26th November (RD), was apparently the first from the island.

Sulawesi

A single **Mugimaki Flycatcher** *Ficedula mugimaki* at Lore Lindu on 14th December (RD) was worthy of note.

Sumatra

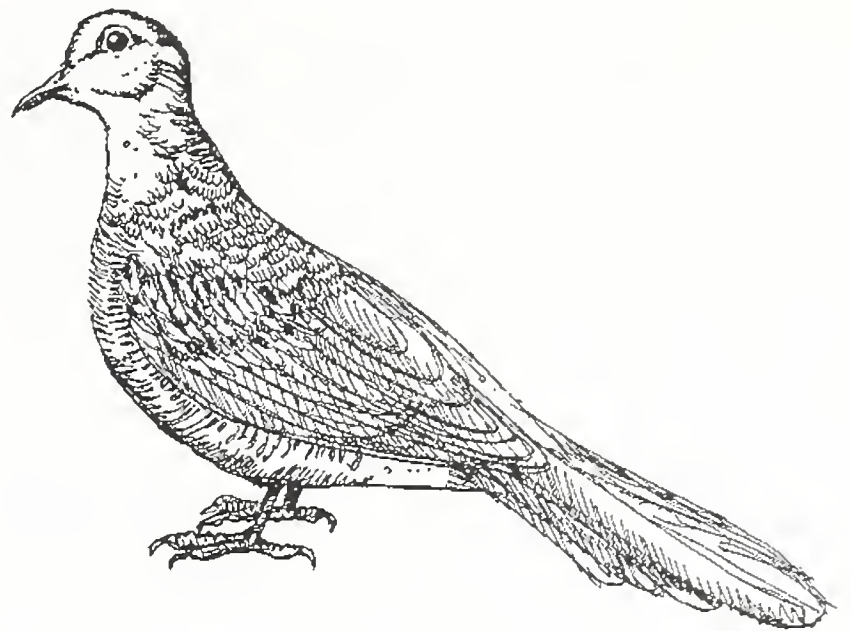
An **Asian Koel** *Eudynamis scolopacea* in coastal scrub at Belimbing, Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park, Lampung, on 23rd August (FV) was unseasonal, considering that it is believed to be a winter visitor. Nearby, at least five pairs of **Malaysian Plovers** *Charadrius peronii* and some immature birds were seen on a beach near Belimbing on 24th August (FV) and on the following day, at the same location, several **Beach Thick-knees** *Esacus neglectus* were found, as well as a nest containing one egg (FV); perhaps the first breeding record from Sumatra. The species was also recorded here on 22nd May 1992 (PJ); the first confirmed record from mainland Sumatra. A single **Chestnut-capped Thrush** *Zoothera interpres* near Tampang, Bukit Barisan Selatan NP, on 22nd August (FV) appears to be only the third from mainland Sumatra. The same observer also found an adult and two dependent juveniles in a bird market in Kota Agung; dealers said that the birds had originated from the southern peninsula (within Bukit Barisan Selatan NP). It seems that this species, which was well known to local people, is commoner on the mainland (at least locally) than was previously thought. Also of interest in the park was a single **Oriental Hobby** *Falco severus* on 19th August (FV). Single singing **Hooded Pittas** *Pitta sordida* were heard near Muara Sako, Kerinci-Seblat NP, in May (EV) and at Bukit Barisan Selatan NP on 20th August (FV). Four **Pacific Black Ducks** *Anas superciliosa* were also found at Lake Belibis, near Kerinci-Seblat NP, Jambi, in May (EV).

Sumba

A single **Bonelli's Eagle** *Hieraaetus fasciatus* at Lewa on 28th October (RD), was apparently the first from the island.

Timor

Interesting observations in August (RD) included a single **Australian Ibis** *Threskiornis molucca* at Pan Muti on 8th, a first for Timor. Also of interest at Pan Muti were 11 **Red-capped Plovers** *Charadrius ruficapillus* on 7th–8th, a single **Caspian Tern** *Sterna caspia* on 8th and a male **Cinnamon Bittern** *Ixobrychus cinnamomeus* on 7th (second record for Timor). Two **House Swifts** *Apus affinis* were also seen, over Kupang, on 14th August.



Peaceful Dove *Geopelia striata* by Sutari Bin Supari

LAOS

Six new species for the country were found during the period under review: a single **Peaceful Dove** *Geopelia striata* on the outskirts of Vientiane on 17th October (TE,LW), two **Grey Plovers** *Pluvialis squatarola* and a subadult **Black-headed Gull** *Larus ridibundus* at Don Chan, Vientiane, on 7th November (TE,LW), a male **Japanese Robin** *Erithacus akahige* at Nakai-Nam Theun National Biodiversity Conservation Area (1,450 m elevation), C Laos, in December (WR) and **Ashy Wood Pigeon** *Columba pulchricollis* and several **Purple Cochoas** *Cochoa purpurea* found for sale in markets at Phonsavan, Xiangkhoang, N Laos, in mid-February (WD,TE *et al.*); both long overdue. A single **Eurasian Wryneck** *Jynx torquilla*, near Saravan on 23rd February (ASt), was the first from S Laos, while a male **Slaty-backed Flycatcher** *Ficedula hodgsonii* along the Nam Xot, Nakai Plateau/Nakai-Nam Theun NBCA boundary (600 m elevation), on 12th January (WD) was new for C Laos. Other interesting sightings at Don Chan, Vientiane (TE,LW), included a female **Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon** *Treron sphenura*, at unusually low altitude, on 21st November, an impressive count of 500 **Oriental Pratincoles** *Glareola maldivarum* on 24th October and a single **Black Kite** *Milvus migrans* on 7th November.

MALAYSIA

Peninsular Malaysia

A single **Eurasian Coot** *Fulica atra*, with **Common Moorhens** *Gallinula chloropus* and **Little Grebes** *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, on an old mining pool at Malim Nawar, Perak, on 24th July (LKCh), 26th July (ARK,ARA,MC) and still present about two

weeks later, was the first record from Malaysia. A **Barred Eagle Owl** *Bubo sumatranus* near the Lodge Bungalow, Fraser's Hill, on 7th June (MC), was new to the area and at an unusually high elevation. Also of interest in autumn was a single **Chinese Egret** *Egretta eulophotes* at Jason's Bay, Johor, on 19th October (SR,DD,JD,PS,BS).

Sabah

The only interesting record received was of a single **Glossy Ibis** *Plegadis falcinellus* at Likas Bird Sanctuary, near Kota Kinabalu on 14th April (DY).

NEPAL

A single **Blyth's Kingfisher** *Alcedo hercules* was seen along the Shabhaya Khola, north-east of Tumlingtar (450 m elevation), Arun Valley, on 12th May (HC,PH,YH,RK); only the second Nepal record. Also in the Arun Valley, four **Sultan Tits** *Melanochlora sultanea* just below Num, en route to Seduwa on 15th May and another two near Thopku Oral on 22nd May, were at the unusually high altitudes of 1,550 m and 2,500 m respectively (HC,PH,YH). Of interest in Makalu-Barun, E Nepal, were two **Nepal Wren Babblers** *Pnoepyga immaculata* at Chhunapu Khola, west of Norbu (HC) and another three at Zing Zing Khola, north of Dingje on 22nd May (HC,PH,YH). Also worth a mention were a single **Wood Snipe** *Gallinago nemoricola*, close to the stream coming from Gokyo Lake (4,500 m elevation), Sagarmatha National Park (TG; no date given), and a male **Jerdon's Bushchat** *Saxicola jerdoni* in grassland at Dobhan, Karnali, Royal Bardia NP, on 27th October (STi,PR); the first from the park.

PAKISTAN

Two interesting records were received from the Vale of Peshawar, North West Frontier Province (JK): a single **Sirkeer Malkoha** *Phaenicophaeus leschenanltii* on 12th November and at least three **Striated Grassbirds** *Megalurus palustris* in a small wetland on 27th December; the latter constituting a considerable range extension to the north-west.

PHILIPPINES

A single **Yellow-rumped Flycatcher** *Ficedula zanthopygia* on Mount Hamut, Luzon, on 13th April (PHe,EV), was apparently a first for the Philippines. Also of interest at this locality was a single **Philippine Needletail** *Mearnsia picina* on 11th April (PHe,EV). Noteworthy observations at

Sibaliw, Panay, during 21st–23rd March (PHe,EV) included three or four **Negros Bleeding-hearts** *Gallicolumba keayi* and six **White-throated Jungle Flycatchers** *Rhinomyias albigularis*.

SINGAPORE

A **Short-tailed Shearwater** *Puffinus tenuirostris*, found on a shallow pool of rainwater in the Woodlands Block 772 area, on 22nd June (SRa), was the first national record; it flew off after a few hours. Another vagrant, a male **Masked Finfoot** *Heliopais personata*, was present at Sungei Buloh Nature Park on 12th–13th January (SRa et al.). The sighting of an **Ashy Drongo** *Dicrurus leucophaeus leucogenis* at Mount Faber on 25th November (SR,SS) provided the second Singapore record of this migrant Chinese subspecies. Other rarities during the period under review were: a single **Oriental Cuckoo** *Cuculus saturatus* at Loyang Woods on 22nd November (SR), a female **Little Green Pigeon** *Treron olax* at Sungei Besar, Pulau Ubin, on 24th October (SR,PS,BS), a single **Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus* at Serangoon on 4th October (LKC,DR), an immature **Shikra** *Accipiter badius* at Marina South on 14th November (SR), a juvenile **Christmas Island Frigatebird** *Fregata andrewsi* flying north-east off south-eastern Pulau Ubin on July 26th (SR), a single **Yellow-eared Spiderhunter** *Arachnothera chrysogenys* at Sungei Besar, Pulau Ubin, on 15th December (SR), presumably a visitor from nearby Peninsular Malaysia, and two immature **Citrine Wagtails** *Motacilla citreola* at Serangoon on 4th October (SR,DR), only the third Singapore record.



Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus leucogenis* by Sutari Bin Supari



Buffy Fish Owl *Ketupa ketupu* by Sutari Bin Supari

Three **Buffy Fish Owls** *Ketupa ketupu* at MacRitchie North-West on 13th December (SR) were unusual and there were exceptional numbers of **Himalayan Swiftlets** *Collocalia brevirostris* noted on passage in autumn, particularly during October–November, at several locations (SR). Of wider interest, there was an albino or leucistic **Greater Sand Plover** *Charadrius leschenaultii* at Sungei Buloh on 14th November (KK) and it was still present on 16th November (DL).

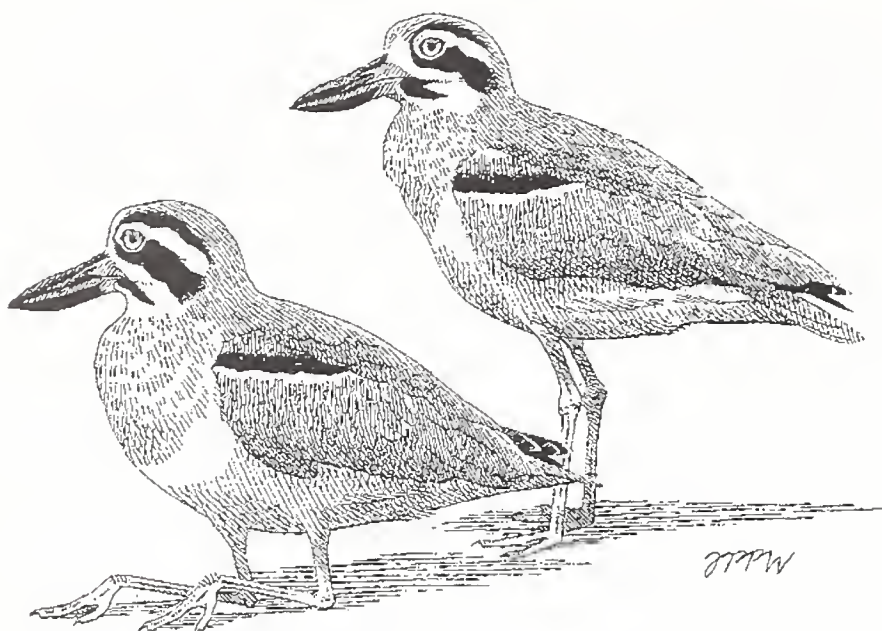
THAILAND

Two **Common Shelducks** *Tadorna tadorna*, reported from Bung Boraphet in mid-January (per PRO) are apparently the first from C Thailand. A record of a **Black-tailed Crake** *Porzana bicolor*, which responded to tape-playback by the small reservoir at Den Ya Khat substation, Doi Chiang Dao Wildlife Sanctuary, on 12th December (HB,AY), provides a welcome new locality for this very local species. On the coast of the inner Gulf of Thailand, there was a single **Spoon-billed Sandpiper** *Calidris pygmaea* at Samut Sakhon on 14th February (PRO,ND); although currently a vagrant, it may turn out to winter locally in very small numbers. A single **Oriental Darter** *Anhinga melanogaster* was seen near Ayuthaya on 3rd July (SM,SD) and another over Prawase, Bangkok, on 1st October (KR). Over 100 **Indian Cormorants** *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis* were found nesting at Wat Nimitsatharam, Phanat Nikhom (Chonburi), on 14th August (UB,TT); a new site for this nationally threatened species. In the south, two **Great-billed Herons** *Ardea sumatrana*, a species not reliably

recorded for many years, were reported from Khlong 5, Phru To Daeng, Narathiwat, on 14th October (TT). No fewer than 112 **Painted Storks** *Mycteria leucocephala* and 25 **Spot-billed Pelicans** *Pelecanus philippensis* were found feeding on a huge partially drained prawn pond near Wat Khao Takhrao, Ban Laem District, Phetchaburi, on 12th September (AW) and 50 of the former and four of the latter were still present there on 23rd September (PC). Of even greater significance was a single **Milky Stork** *Mycteria cinerea* in this flock on 24th September (PC) and 25th September (PC,AS,ST *et al.*), with three on 28th September (JV *et al.*), four on 29th September (TT) and one remaining until at least 4th October (SSu). There are only two previous Thai records, from nearby Samut Prakan during winter 1993–94 and Satun Province over 60 years ago. The sighting of two flocks of c. 10 **Japanese White-eyes** *Zosterops japonicus* at Doi Ang Khang, Chiang Mai, on 19th July (SM,SD) confirms local oversummering. A single **White-crowned Forktail** *Enicurus leschenaultii* near the summit of Doi Inthanon (c. 2,400 m elevation) on 14th July (SM,SD), was at a higher altitude than previously recorded for the species in South-East Asia. Also seen at this locality a female **Golden Bush Robin** *Tarsiger chrysaeus* (see photo, page 29) was seen well on 2nd December when a possible male of this species was also glimpsed (TB,NH). A **Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* at Khao Yai NP on 4th July (SM,SD) was a very early migrant, though not quite the earliest. A male **Jerdon's Bushchat** *Saxicola jerdoni* was found by the Mekong River, Chiang Saen on December 8th (KS,NH,NM).

VIETNAM

A number of unusual records were received from Xuan Thuy, Red River Delta. The most remarkable was a single **Great Thick-knee** *Esacus recurvirostris* on 9th September (JE,RG), the first from E Tonkin. Two **Caspian Terns** *Sterna caspia* on 21st November (PB,CP) were also new for this region. Also of interest were a single **Eastern Curlew** *Numenius madagascariensis* on 12th October (JE), eight **Black-tailed Gulls** *Larus crassirostris* in early February (JE), a single **Pallas's Gull** *L. ichthyaetus* on 26th November (JE,BK) with two in early February (JE), four **Spot-billed Pelicans** *Pelecanus philippensis* and 2,000 Chinese **Pond Herons** *Ardeola bacchus* on 9th September (JE,RG), three **Rosy Minivets** *Pericrocotus roseus* on 10th October (JE) and surprisingly, a male



Great Thick-knee *Esacus recurvirostris* by Jan Wilczur

Small Niltava *Niltava macgrigoriae*, on an offshore island, on 26th November (JE,BK). Fieldwork in Pu Mat Reserve, Nghe Tinh, during September–November resulted in the discovery of 21 new species for N Annam (P_{Ro} unless stated): **Rufous-necked Hornbill** *Aceros nipalensis*, **Green Bee-eater** *Merops orientalis*, **House Swift** *Apus affinis*, **Slaty-breasted Rail** *Gallirallus striatus*, **Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*, **Black Baza** *Aviceda leuphotes*, **Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*, **Blue Pitta** *Pitta cyanea*, **Grey-backed Shrike** *Lanius tephronotus*, **Scaly Thrush** *Zoothera dauma*, **Dark-sided Thrush** *Z. marginata*, **White-capped Water Redstart** *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*, **Green Cochoa** *Cochoa viridis*, **Hill Blue Flycatcher** *Cyornis banyumas*, **Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch** *Sitta castanea* (RTi), **Ashy Bulbul** *Hemixos flava* (RTi), **Two-barred Warbler** *Phylloscopus (trochiloides) plumbeitarsus*, **Coral-billed Scimitar Babbler** *Pomatorhinus ferruginosus* (RTi), **Chestnut-fronted Shrike Babbler** *Pteruthius aenobarbus* (RTi), **Blue-winged Minla** *Minla cyanouroptera* (RTi) and **Striated Yuhina** *Yuhina castaniceps*. Nocturnal moth-trapping by a group of biologists, on a burnt-off grassy ridge-top at 1,000 m elevation in September, resulted in

the accidental capture of several interesting avian passage migrants, including **Yellow-legged Buttonquail** *Turnix tanki*, **Lesser Coucal** *Centropus bengalensis*, **Slaty-breasted Rail** and **Common Moorhen** (as previously mentioned) and **Cinnamon Bittern** *Ixobrychus cinnamomeus* (per P_{Ro},RTi).

Contributors: Abdul Rahim Abdullah (ARA), Amir Roslan Ab. Khalib (ARK), T. Ball (TB), M. Barua (MB), P. Benstead (PB), Birdquest, U. Borvornwinyanant (UB), H. Buck (HB), G. Carey (GC), P. Charoenjai (PC), M. Chong (MC), H. Choudhary (HC), D. Dann (DD), J. Dann (JD), S. Dashper (SD), R. Drijvers (RD), W. Duckworth (WD), N. Dymond (ND), J. Eames (JE), T. Evans (TE), T. Giri (TG), R. Grimmett (RG), N. Haass (NH), R. Halder (RH), P. Hale (PH), Y. Hale (YH), P. Heath (PHe), P. Holt (PHo), J. Hornskov (JH), P. Jepson (PJ), D. Johnson (DJ), R. Karki (RK), K. Kee (KK), B. King (BK), J. Kylanpaa (JK), S. Lahl (SL), Lim Kim Chuah (LKC), Lim Kim Chye (LKCh), D. Layman (DL), D. Lesmana (DLe), W. McDowell (WM), N. Model (NM), S. Myers (SM), C. Petersson (CP), W. Prayitno (WP), S. Rajathurai (SR), S. Rashid (SRa), K. Rattanajun (KR), D. Roark (DR), W. Robichaud (WR), C. Robson (CR), P. Roseverise (PR), P. Round (P_{Ro}), A. Sriyabhaya (AS), B. Stafford (BS), P. Stafford (PS), A. Stones (AS_t), S. Subaraj (SS), Sunbird, S. Supparatvikorn (SSu), K. Sutasha (KS), T. Tantitadapitak (TT), S. Thanombudha (ST), R. Thorpe (RT), R. Timmins (RTi), S. Tiwary (STi), C. Trainor (CT), P. Undeland (PU), F. Verbelen (FV), E. Vercruysse (EV), J. Visetchinda (JV), L. Watson (LW), A. Wattanayuth (AW), D. Weir (DW), D. Yong (DY), A. Young (AY).

Erratum: The record of two Pine Grosbeaks *Pinicola enucleator* from Omei Shan, mentioned under the China section of *From the field* in OBC Bull. 28, has subsequently been withdrawn by the observers.



Recently Published

Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. By Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp. Christopher Helm, London, 1998. 888 pp. 153 colour plates. £55.00. ISBN 0 7136 4004 9.

For almost 18 years Ali & Ripley's *Pictorial Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*, with plates by John Henry Dick, has been the only field guide covering the whole of the Indian subcontinent. Although an invaluable book, it has several major failings, not least the lack of text other than brief range descriptions. The splendid new *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*, the first of three new field guides on the subcontinent's avifauna, fills the niche more than adequately. It is an absolutely brilliant piece of work.

The introduction includes a useful map, an outline history of ornithology in the region, notes on the area's climate and interesting sections on the main habitats and their associated bird species. The impact of two excellent maps depicting the original and current forest cover would have been stronger had they been presented on facing pages, however. There are also sections on the region's importance for birds, another map of the eight Endemic Bird Areas, sections on migration, conservation and threats, national organisations, as well as a large bird topography chart and a comprehensive glossary.

Not surprisingly considering the authorship, the taxonomy, sequence and nomenclature follow *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* by Inskipp, Lindsey & Duckworth (1996), and hence the sequence is almost identical to that adopted by Sibley & Monroe. This is still unusual for a field guide and means, at least for me, that the book's comprehensive English and scientific indexes are already well thumbed.

The book is bang up-to-date. All species recorded in the subcontinent up to the end of 1996 are described, nearly 1,300 in all. With 153 plates, and an average of eight or nine species per plate, the choice of what to illustrate has been good and the layout of most plates has been well executed. One-sixth of the plates depict five species or less and one illustrates just two species: Eurasian Marsh and Pied Harriers! A few species, e.g. some partridges and owls, only merit one illustration

while others have seasonal, sexual and age-related differences as well as birds in flight and racial variation depicted. Hence, Eurasian Marsh Harrier has 17 illustrations, Yellow Wagtail 13 and Peregrine Falcon 10. Only a couple of plates appear too cramped, e.g. plate 25, depicting hanging parrots and parakeets, has 39 illustrations of 15 species.

With 12 artists the quality of the plates inevitably varies; some are outstanding and are the best illustrations that exist for the species. My favourites include Jan Wilczur's petrels and shearwaters, John Cox's pigeons, Kim Franklin's vultures and Craig Robson's babblers. It is enlightening to see many of Martin Elliott's gulls and terns in wing moult, just as they often appear in the region. Succinct captions accompany each plate and detail the species' range, seasonality and the most important identification features.

Much more detail is found in the comprehensive species accounts that form the bulk of the book. For each species a list of pseudonyms is followed by sections on the identification, voice, habits, habitat, breeding, breeding distribution and status. References are cited for several species. There is a sensible use of bold type throughout for the section headings.

The identification sections vary enormously in length and distinguish, where appropriate, males, females, juveniles and immatures. Differences from potential confusion species are detailed and there is little repetition between species. It shows that there has been an extensive search of recent identification literature, backed up by careful study of a good many museum specimens and the authors' personal knowledge.

I particularly enjoyed the superb voice sections. They have been similarly well researched and again present a wealth of previously unpublished, original material. Many of the voice transcriptions are the authors' own but, in the thorough fashion typical of the book, tape recordings from at least 18 different sound recordists were also used. Where this has been inadequate, information published elsewhere has been incorporated. This is always credited to source, a task done all too infrequently in similar works. Some of the voice transcriptions are

particularly outstanding, e.g. Lesser Coucal which runs to nearly 90 words but, as is inevitably the case, a few are less than convincing.

Sections on habits, habitat and often breeding, as well as succinct distribution and status comments, follow. The latter separately detail the status in Pakistan, Nepal, India, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives where relevant. Although the distribution maps are a masterpiece in themselves and far surpass anything that has been published previously, it is a shame that space demanded they were published so small. It is also very frustrating that they were not in full colour, or at least a little darker. The information is there and I have taken to reading the maps with a magnifying glass!

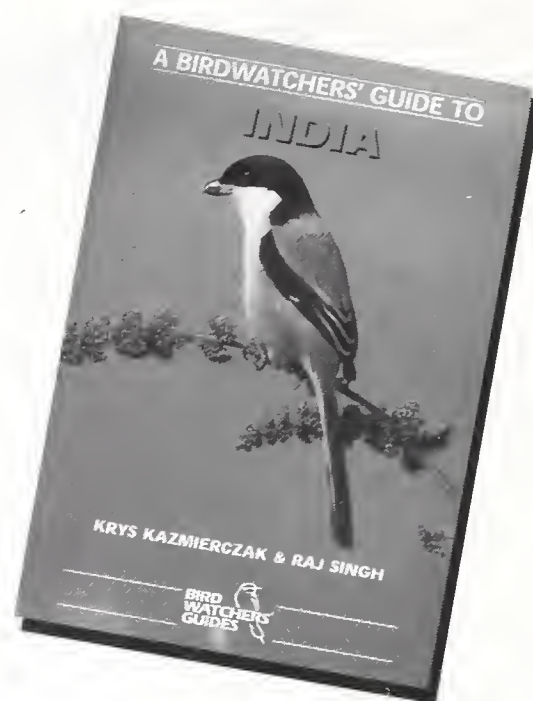
This is a brilliant book and one that can be recommended unequivocally. Thoroughly and professionally researched, it contains a wealth of original and previously unpublished material. It is sure to instil further interest in the subcontinent's rich avifauna, and especially their identification, habits and distribution. The £55 price tag may seem a little steep but it is worth every penny for the maps, the plates, and the identification and voice sections alone, and there is so much more to it than that. Running to 888 pages and weighing in at a hefty 2.3 kgs, it is more of a handbook than a field guide and I suspect that there is still a market for a smaller, pocket-sized, true 'field guide'.

Paul Holt

A Birdwatchers' Guide to India. By Krys Kazmierczak and Raj Singh. Prion, Sandy, 1998. 334 pp; many maps. £18.75. ISBN 1 871104 08 4.

This is the latest title in this excellent series of Prion's Birdwatchers' Guides and it takes on a very large and diverse country with a huge bird list, detailing all the essential birding sites. As one can imagine with such a great deal of territory to cover, the book is fairly substantial, and the enormous work in compiling it stands as a tribute to the authors, whose love of Indian birding and huge experience is so evident.

The introductory chapters serve as a good travel guide and cover such useful things as travel information, climate, health, books, maps and advice on approaching the authorities for birding in areas where permits are required (potentially a time-consuming headache as anyone who has travelled in India will confirm). As with the other



guides in this series, this book has a main site-guide section, here divided into 11 areas in which are listed the best birding localities for each region. A wealth of information is provided for each place, subdivided into location, accommodation, strategy and the species likely to be encountered; some very interesting additional 'lesser' sites are added at the end of many of the sections. The text is backed up with some very clear maps of each site which will be a great help to the user. The English bird names follow the new OBC Checklist but a more traditional systematic order has been retained.

At the end of the main section there are lists and appendices, including a full bird list for the country and even a comprehensive mammal list. One very useful and exciting section is the Selective Bird List, which is a hit list of the uncommon, endemic and endangered species — the most sought-after birds of the whole country and where to see them.

This is a much-needed volume: an indispensable means with which to see many great birds, and a godsend for those with an appetite for Asian birding, be it the first-time visitor (for whom this book is ideal) or the seasoned Oriental region birder with target-specific needs. With the recent publication of a new, modern and comprehensive guide to the birds of the region, this book will be the essential companion in every birder's baggage, and I am sure it will lead to a deluge of birders visiting the country. With so many great localities and so much information on where to find the birds all catalogued in a single volume, surely the next stop after the bookshop is the travel agent. Buy it and go!

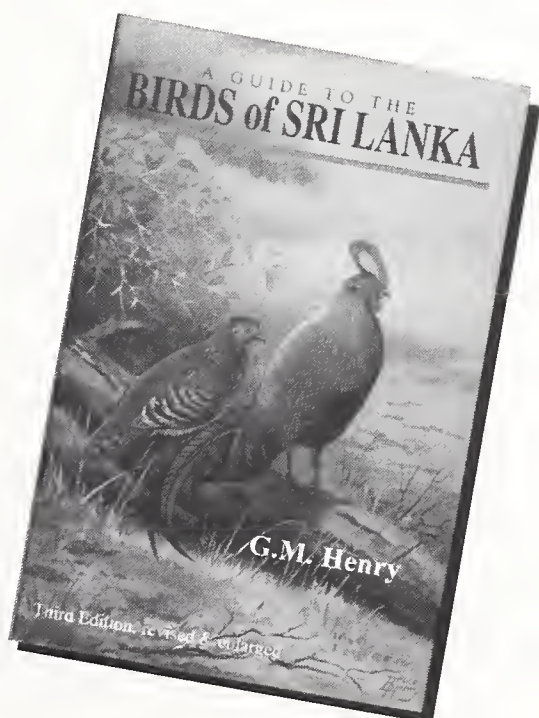
Dave Farrow

A Guide to the Birds of Sri Lanka by G. M. Henry. Third edition. Revised and enlarged by Thilo W. Hoffman, Deepal Warakagoda and Upali Ekanayake. Oxford University Press, Delhi. 1998. xlvii + 488 pages. 29 colour plates, 3 black-and-white plates, 142 line drawings. £25.00. ISBN 0 19 563813 1.

Arguably, no one has done more to encourage an interest in Sri Lankan natural history than G. M. Henry with his classic *A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon*, first published in 1955. The third revised edition, coming eleven years after the 1987 reprint (of the second edition in 1971), has been eagerly awaited. Henry's, as it is known, goes far beyond an identification field guide. It contains a wealth of information and merits the status of a handbook. Furthermore, Henry's style of writing brings to it a certain style reminiscent of a literary work. Contributions to the third edition from Thilo Hoffman, Deepal Warakagoda and Upali Ekanayake, three of the country's most experienced ornithologists, have ensured that Henry's will remain an authoritative and comprehensive book. Virtually every species and subspecies recorded in Sri Lanka, over 460 in total, has been included.

The third edition is described as a "soft revision" and the character of Henry's original work has been left largely untouched. The supplementary text relating to distribution and status is usually given at the end of the original text. Given the mix of old and new material, it might have worked better if the new text had been indented or italicised. As it stands, it is not always clear whether the context is 1955 or 1998.

The nomenclature has been revised largely with reference to Wijesinghe (1994), official Sinhala names have been introduced, and new accounts included for 53 species and subspecies.



Surprisingly, no mention is made of the divergence of opinion between Wijesinghe (1994) and Inskipp *et al.* (1996) with regard to the endemics. Nor is any mention made of a competing compilation of Sinhala names, which will only confuse matters with regard to a stable Sinhala nomenclature. Two new plates and four new sketches by G. M. Henry's son, Bruce, have been included. Given the talent of Bruce Henry, it is disappointing that a significant number of birds still remain illustrated only in black-and-white.

Sadly, the book has been compromised by poor printing which is in stark contrast to the excellently produced second edition of 1971 and reprint of 1987. The black-and-white figures look like second or third generation photocopies, with resolution and detail lost. The colour plates are of variable quality. Some have a crispness, clarity and colour balance that match the quality of the second edition, but frustratingly too many plates have been reproduced poorly. Plate 8, depicting the quails, is not even in focus. The publishers have disappointed many people by failing to achieve the quality that is expected of them.

Despite the above criticisms, Henry's still ranks as a good field guide cum handbook. The book's strength lies in the quality of the text, and the writing is eminently readable. The detailed information presented, together with coverage of virtually every species and subspecies recorded in Sri Lanka, will ensure it remains a standard reference for many years to come. It may not suit the tastes of those birders who desire only to identify a bird, but for those who relish great bird books, this book will remain a pleasure.

References

- Inskipp, T., Lindsey, N. & Duckworth, W. (1996). *An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region*. Oriental Bird Club, Sandy.
- Wijesinghe, D. P. (1994). *Checklist of the Birds of Sri Lanka*. Special Publication Series No. 2, Ceylon Bird Club, Colombo.

Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne

Threatened Birds of Sri Lanka: National Red List by Thilo W. Hoffman. Ceylon Bird Club. Special Publication Series No. 3. 28 pp. ISBN 955 8139 00 0.

This is a much-needed review of the conservation status of Sri Lanka's avifauna by one its most respected ornithologists. It is the successor to the author's first National Red Data List, which was published in 1984. The IUCN categories and the

application of its criteria to a relatively small island such as Sri Lanka are initially discussed. This is very useful, especially as the IUCN classifications arrived at may not seem obvious in some cases. For example, the Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush is locally not rare, and may not be perceived to be at serious risk until viewed in the context of its total available habitat.

Two lists are presented. The first deals with the endemic birds of Sri Lanka as recognised in Wijesinghe's 1994 checklist. Of the 26 species listed, 21 attract a threat category of Endangered or Vulnerable. The second list details a further 53 threatened resident birds of Sri Lanka. Not surprisingly, the deciding criterion for all the endemics relates to the extent of their occurrence.

The lists are preceded by a discussion correlating the avifauna to Sri Lanka's climatic zones and forest cover, accompanied by critical data. A map illustrates the country's pronounced climatic zones, which have led to three geographical races in some species. The data on habitat and forest cover have been the major factors in assessing the status of a species. This is not surprising, as the extent of occurrence is probably the easiest to quantify and permits a degree of objectivity.

An interesting addition is the parallel listing of an empirical category based on the author's subjective assessment of changes of population and habitat, and its quality. For example, the Yellow-fronted Barbet, a common endemic in the wet zone, merits a Least Concern classification empirically, whereas it gets a Vulnerable tag under the IUCN criteria.

Hoffman concludes with a plea for habitat conservation, particularly with regard to the Peak Wilderness, the last remaining altitudinally graded forest in the country. Hoffman's revised National Red List will be an important addition to the arsenal of the conservation lobby.

Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne

Hong Kong Bird Report 1996. Edited by G. J. Carey. Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, 1998. 178 pp. ISSN 1017 118.

The heavily developed port of Hong Kong is not rich in breeding birds and yet its importance as a migration watchpoint has made it one of the top birding destinations in Asia. Even a cursory glance at the 1996 Hong Kong Bird Report will tell you why a visit to this small part of coastal

China is an absolute must for all birders. This extremely well produced report lists all the 362 species of wild origin (a new record in itself) seen that year, as well as the birds that might possibly be escapes, a real problem in Hong Kong where the keeping of caged birds is a national obsession.

Most birders probably associate Hong Kong with waders. With 52 species recorded in 1996, this is fair enough and anyone who sat in the Boardwalk Hide at Mai Po on some of the high tides in 1996, watching thousands of eastern waders, all in breeding plumage, teeming across the mud can easily understand why Hong Kong offers the "greatest wader show on earth". And the entry detailing 12 bird-days for Spoon-billed Sandpiper, with the comment that this is a return to normal after the rather poor showing last year, will doubtless turn lots of people's thoughts to a Hong Kong visit next year.

But Hong Kong is about much more than waders, as this report clearly demonstrates. The monthly summaries at the beginning of the report not only give tantalising accounts of the vast range of migrants that pass through or winter here, but also show what an exciting birding site Hong Kong is. This is backed up by the detailed reports which include, among others, accounts of 13 species of buntings, 17 flycatchers and 11 *Phylloscopus* warblers.

Also contained in the Report are the winter waterfowl counts for the 95/96 and 96/97 winters, as well as the annual ringing summary. Ringing at Hong Kong is well established and the report lists the 3,570 birds of 150 species that were processed there in 1996.

What perhaps make the Hong Kong Bird Report such interesting and indeed essential reading are the short notes and papers covering many aspects of Hong Kong's birds. Over the years these reports have contained some ground-breaking identification papers on such species as snipes and large gulls. There are no such major papers in the 1996 report but the note on Asian Lesser Cuckoo, a new species for Hong Kong, contains some excellent in-hand photographs and discussion on the bird's identification, while the paper on Grey and Savanna Nightjars is equally illuminating.

The distribution of birdwatchers in Hong Kong is a bit like the birds: not many residents but lots passing through at migration time. However, this report is testament to the dedicated work put in by all those involved with the birding scene in Hong Kong and is essential reading for

anyone considering a visit there or who wants to know what a really good bird report should look like.

Steve Rooke

Starlings and Mynas. By Chris Feare and Adrian Craig. Illustrated by Barry Croucher, Chris Shields and Kamol Komolphalin. Christopher Helm, London, 1998. 285 pp. 32 colour plates. £32.00. ISBN 0 7136 3961 X.

The OBC's *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* listed 40 and Sibley & Monroe's *Distribution and Taxonomy of Birds of the World* treated 41 starlings from the Oriental region, but Feare & Craig make it 45, exploding *Sturnus* into four revived genera (and transferring a further two to *Acridotheres*). However, I am defeated why on the one hand they neglected the chance to reinstate *Goodfellowia* for the altogether off-the-wall Apo Myna '*Basilornis*' *miranda*, and how on the other they worked up the confidence to split the Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa* into four species (Nias Hill Myna *G. robusta*, Enggano Hill Myna *G. enganensis* and Southern Hill Myna *G. indica* being the newcomers). The Nias bird is certainly a stonker, but the race *batuensis* from Batu and Mentawai is not far behind, and the Enggano bird is diagnosed merely on colour gloss and bill shape. Skins of Hill Mynas in the Natural History Museum, Tring, give me a strong sense of their variability *within*, as much as *between*, subspecies, and I am a tad reluctant to see them split without convincing evidence — yet none of the Asian material seems here to have been measured afresh, and subspecies are not supplied with even secondhand mensural data, so the degree of approach between *G. robusta* and *G. religiosa batuensis* cannot be checked. (Result: I get a mild sense of being sold a pig in a poke.) The other species created by splitting here are Pale-bellied Myna *Acridotheres cinereus* of southern Sulawesi (not the *A. cinereus* of the OBC Checklist owing to a different view of name precedence) and Great Myna *A. grandis* (also split by Sibley and Monroe) of north-east India to Indochina.

Most of the information in the texts is derived from standard sources, and I feel sure that a little more delving would have illuminated some seemingly little-known species (*nothing* recorded of the voice of Apo Myna?), but in general the syntheses appear clear and correct; I found them pleasantly informal and informative. The plates are often excellent, although the Bali Starling

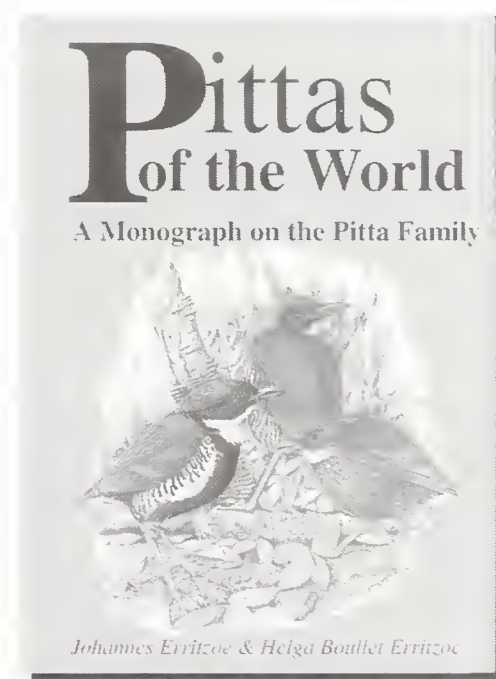
Lencopsar rothschildi is done scant justice, and a flying White-cheeked Starling *Sturnus cineraceus* on plate 16 has replaced a female Wattled Starling *Creatophora cinerea* (the text for White-cheeked Starling, incidentally, is cut short in mid-sentence). The maps, placed with the plate captions, are occasionally *very* hard to read — the postage-stamp that passes for the world map of Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* made me laugh out loud (I can *just* discern that it misses the bird's Australian toeholds); on map 31 the Sulus (Philippines) are mistaken for the Sulas (Moluccas).

"We hope that these birds will be there for them and their children" says the dedication to the authors' offspring. Amen to that, sirs, but a chance was missed to put real flesh on the bones of this wish in the decidedly skeletal (19-line) conservation section that concludes the introduction. Great birds, though — fabulous birds — and, cavil as I might, I am thrilled to see this solid attractive book out and about.

N. J. Collar

Pittas of the World: A Monograph on the Pitta Family. By Johannes Erritzoe and Helga Boullet Erritzoe. The Lutterworth Press, Cambridge, 1998. 207 pp. 32 colour plates. £30. ISBN 0 7188 2961 1.

For visitors to the forests of Asia, Australasia or equatorial Africa, the sighting of a pitta always ranks as a highlight. Our appreciation of these superb birds was enhanced by the publication of *Pittas, Broadbills and Asities* by Lambert and Woodcock (Pica Press 1996) and now we have a book solely devoted to the pittas by a Danish ornithologist, Johannes Erritzoe. The style of the Pica Press monographs is now familiar. In



contrast, Erritzoe's book is almost a throwback to an earlier time: a work of dedication, research and scientific fact, illustrated in classic style by his wife Helga Boulet Erritzoe.

In respect of taxonomy, the two books basically agree. Both split *Pitta venusta* from the *P. granatina* group although, in defiance of Lambert's well-argued logic, this book again lumps *P. ussheri*. In addition, Erritzoe does not recognise *P. dohertyi* as a full species, in contrast (albeit with little supporting evidence) to Lambert. To add to the controversy of English bird names Erritzoe, for an unspecified reason, relegates Bar-bellied Pitta to its former name, Elliott's Pitta, and introduces Necklaced Pitta for Blue-banded.

I will not claim to have read critically through the full texts of either book but the contrast between field-worker Lambert and the, I presume, more museum research-orientated Erritzoe is obvious. Both books contain a formidable amount of information, but Erritzoe gives more emphasis about individual museum specimens and their collection localities. He also provides the first descriptions of the "dusky streaks" found only in this family. It is interesting to note that, although Lambert does not mention this feature, several of Woodcock's paintings show it.

When it comes to the illustrations, the contrast is major; nowhere more so than on the dust jackets where Woodcock's electrifying rendering of the *irena* race of *P. guajana* (a candidate for the "fairest and finest") contrasts vividly with Helga Boulet's almost Victorian grouping of *P. gurneyi* (another candidate for that title). This contrast is obvious throughout. Woodcock's simple vivid plates of mostly upright birds (including several birds in flight, frequently the way a bird is seen) are made with identification in mind. Helga Boulet's are really works of art, but in several cases her hunched-up, tailless birds do little to convey the true, spring-heeled jizz of the birds in life.

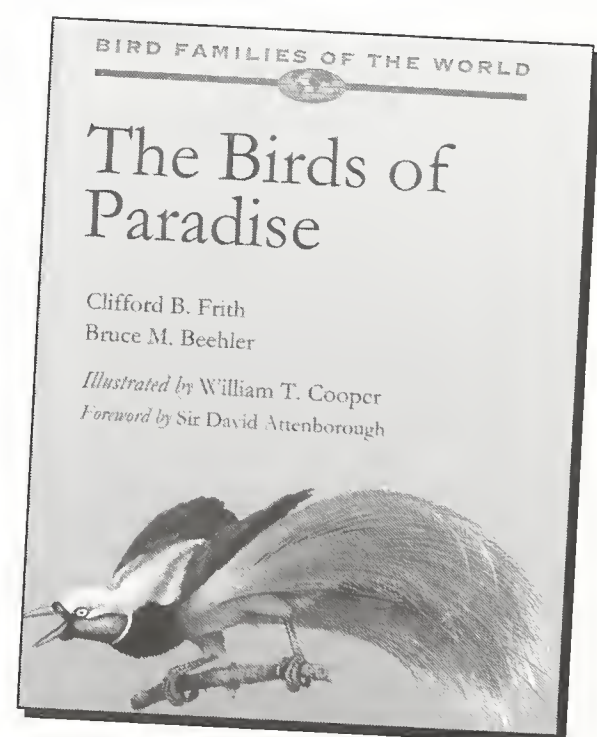
Field birders will probably prefer Lambert's book and this new work may also suffer from coming on the market two years later. Serious ornithologists and collectors of fine bird books will, however, appreciate the Erritzoes' contribution. Many people will undoubtedly acquire both and for those that do, look again at Helga Boulet's Plate 13. If you haven't yet made the journey to Halmahera to see the legendary Ivory-breasted Pitta, I can think of no further incentive that you will need.

Hugh Buck

The Birds of Paradise. By Clifford B. Frith and Bruce M. Beehler. Illustrated by William T. Cooper. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998. xxx + 613 pp. 15 colour plates. £50.00. ISBN 0 19 854853 2.

Although the birds of paradise only just encroach into the Oriental Region in the Moluccas, many birders travelling to the area will be strongly tempted by these wonderful birds to venture across Weber's Line. For those who wish to learn more about the family than mere identification they can hardly do better than to dip into this new and authoritative opus from OUP. I say "dip into" because this book is considerably larger than the previous works in the same series, running to over 600 pages. The introductory chapter is a very useful summary of the following, more detailed chapters on the history of discovery, evolution and biogeography, ecology, reproductive behaviour, nesting, the place of birds of paradise in human culture, and conservation. These chapters are very comprehensive and readable. I was particularly fascinated by the discussion of the evolution of polygamy in Paradisaeidae, if not wholly convinced by the argument.

The plates, as one would expect from William Cooper, are very attractive and mostly accurate. The Wilson's Bird of Paradise is a little disappointing, not quite conveying the jizz of the bird, and soft part colours, which are so striking in the field, are too dull, and the difference between the sexes in the crown colour is exaggerated. The three manucodes, Glossy-mantled, Jobi and Crinkle-collared, depicted on plate 5, do not appear to have been painted from typical specimens. The Glossy-mantled is shown with a square-cut tail whereas, as stated in the



text, it usually shows a graduated tail. The illustration of Jobi Manucode has a conspicuously long bill whereas this bird, typically, has a shorter, stubbier bill than the other two species.

The species accounts are very comprehensive, including descriptions of all known plumages, distribution including very clear maps, discussion of subspecies including full biometric data, vocalisations including sonagrams, description of the courtship display (often with excellent monochrome illustrations), conservation, and a useful paragraph on areas for future research. Omissions seem to be very few, but no vocalisation descriptions are given for Long-tailed Paradigalla, a species which has been tape-recorded by several birders. However, this is probably as much a criticism of the observers concerned, including myself, who have not got around to publishing their information in the appropriate journals. No doubt this book, as well as furnishing us with much invaluable information, will encourage those with new data to put them in writing.

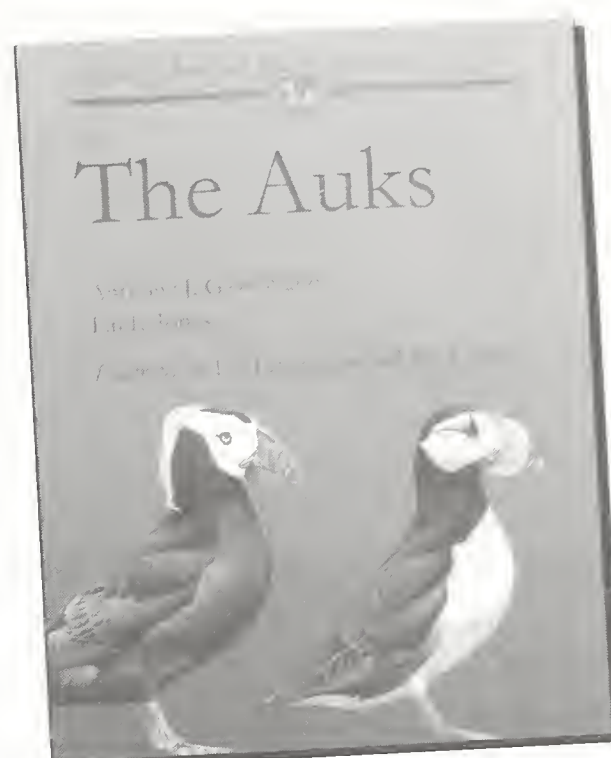
No book on biological entities still extant can ever claim to be the last word on the subject, especially when those creatures inhabit such a remote corner of the world where research is so difficult. If any books on birds can claim the right to the epithet definitive, Frith and Beehler's *The Birds of Paradise* must be numbered amongst them.

David Gibbs

The Auks: Alcidae. By Anthony J. Gaston and Ian L. Jones. Illustrated by Ian Lewington. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998. xix + 349 pp. 8 colour plates. £40.00. ISBN 0 19 854032 9.

This is the fourth volume in OUP's "Bird Families of the World" series, and in layout and proportions it is similar to the other volumes of the series (with the exception of the much longer *Birds of Paradise* volume). The auk family is exclusively northern hemisphere, typically occurring in the cooler temperate and arctic seas. Indeed, the family only just scrapes into the Oriental region, with two species just reaching the extreme northern parts and another three having been recorded as vagrants.

General chapters covering various aspects of auk biology account for one third of the text, whilst much of the remainder is taken up with the species accounts. All 23 species are treated in detail, including the extinct Great Auk, and each



species has an accompanying range map. The eight colour plates by Ian Lewington are, as one would expect, excellent and cover a good range of plumages, including birds in flight. A plate of winter-plumage auks in flight is particularly useful.

This authoritative book is a valuable addition to the literature and will delight all those with an interest in these enigmatic birds.

Nigel Redman

Stray Feathers



Owl recordings wanted

The British Library National Sound Archive is looking for good quality sound recordings of all non-European owl species for a forthcoming CD sound guide to the owls of the world to be published by Pica Press. However, for the following Oriental or near Oriental species, *any* recordings, even poor quality ones, are urgently needed, both for research and for publication: Minahassa Owl *Tyto inexpectata*, Taliabu Owl *T. nigrobrunnea*, Bismarck Owl *T. aurantia*, White-fronted Scops Owl *Otus sagittatus*, *Otus (spilocephalus) vanderwateri*, Pallid Scops Owl *O. brucei*, Mountain Scops Owl *O. spilocephalus*, Simeulue Scops Owl *O. umbra*, Mindanao Scops Owl *O. mirus*, Flores Scops Owl *O. alfredi*, Enggano Scops Owl *O. engauensis*, Rajah Scops Owl *O. brookii*, Mentawai Scops Owl *O. mentawi*, Mantanani Scops Owl *O. mantananensis*, Biak Island Scops Owl *O. beccarii*, Palau Owl *Pyrroglaux podarginus*, Rock Eagle Owl *Bubo (bubo) bengaleusis*, Tawny Fish Owl *B. flavipes*, Sichuan Wood Owl *Strix davidi*, Papuan Hawk Owl *Uroglaux dimorpha*, Andaman Hawk Owl *Ninox affinis*, Christmas Island Hawk Owl *N. (squamapila) natalis*, Bismarck Hawk Owl *N. variegata*, Sumba Boobook *N. rudolfi*, Ochre-bellied Hawk Owl *N. ochracea*, Speckled Hawk Owl *N. punctulata*. Please send any recordings to: British Library National Sound Archive, 96 Euston Road,

London NW1 2DB, UK. All contributions will be fully acknowledged.

Request for records of House Crows

House Crows *Corvus splendens* have been spreading within the Oriental region during this century. As part of an on-going programme to monitor their worldwide dispersal, records are requested of sightings and the status of this species outside its known range. Apart from their native range, south-east Iran, throughout India, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Burma, introduced populations occur in Eilat in Israel, many inhabited parts of the Arabian coast, Mauritius and Malaysia. They have turned up in small numbers elsewhere but their present status is unknown. As House Crows spread mainly by ship, it is possible that they could appear at almost any port in the region and are particularly likely to appear on the north-east coast of Sumatra and perhaps Borneo, south Vietnam and Cambodia. Please send records to: Colin Ryall, Farnborough College, Boundary Road, Farnborough, Hants GU14 6NU, UK. Tel. +44 (0) 1252 407220, fax +44 (0) 1252 407212, email: c.ryall@farn-ct.ac.uk

23rd International Ornithological Congress in China

The 23rd International Ornithological Congress (IOC)

will be held in Beijing, China from 11–17th August 2002. For more information, please contact Professor Xu Weishu, Secretary General 23rd IOC, Beijing Natural History Museum, 1-1-302, Beijing Science and Technology Commission Apt., Balizhuang, Haidan District, Beijing 100037, China. Tel./fax +86 10 6846 5605, email: s-g@ioc.org.cn

Request for information on Important Bird Areas (IBAs) in China

The BirdLife International Asia Programme is working with a team of 15 top Chinese ornithologists to compile information on the Important Bird Areas (IBAs) of China. Sites will be selected throughout China to protect globally threatened birds, restricted-range species in Endemic Bird Areas, representative areas of important habitats and globally important wetlands and seabird colonies.

A preliminary list of over 350 IBAs was identified at a workshop in Beijing in December 1998, but the final total is likely to be considerably higher. The initial data-gathering on the IBAs will then be completed by the end of 1999, and a book of the IBAs of China will be published (in both Chinese and English).

The IBA team in China is keen to have input from ornithologists and

birdwatchers who have visited China. If you would like to contribute information on important sites for bird conservation in China, please send the following:

- Your name, address and/or email address;
- Sites that you have visited, listed by Chinese province or region. Please indicate (with a *) those sites which you think could qualify as IBAs, with brief details of why they are important;
- The citation or a copy of any papers or trip reports which include details of IBAs in China;

to one of the following people:

- Professor Zhang Zhengwang, Department of Biology, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China, email: zzw@bnu.edu.cn
- Simba Chan, Wild Bird Society of Japan, WING 2-35-2 Minamidaira, Hino City, Tokyo 191-0041, Japan, email: simba.chan@earthling.net
- Mike Crosby, BirdLife International, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge CB3 0NA, UK, email: mike.crosby@birdlife.org.uk

One of the above will contact you for further information on selected IBAs. All contributions will be fully

acknowledged.

International Symposium on Galliformes

The World Pheasant Association will hold a symposium on the conservation and sustainable management of Galliformes, with special emphasis on those species inhabiting the grasslands and forests of South Asia. The symposium will take place from 23rd September–1st October 2000 in Nepal. For more details, please contact Mrs Jane Clacey, World Pheasant Association, P. O. Box 5, Lower Basildon, Reading RG8 9PF, UK. Tel. +44 118 984 5140, fax +44 118 984 3369, email: wpa@gn.apc.org

Millennium Bird Race – Singapore

The Bird Group of the Nature Society (Singapore) will be holding its 16th Bird Race on 18–19th December 1999. There will be Advanced and Novices Categories for this year's race and there are attractive prizes for the top three positions in each category. All OBC members are invited to participate. In last year's race, the participating teams recorded 189 species, so competition is keen and the birding extremely challenging.

Those interested please contact Lim Kim Seng at Block

644 Yishun Street 61, #12-300, Singapore 760644, fax (65) 7590873, email: denislim@cyberway.com.sg no later than 1st December 1999.

Submitting papers and articles: a plea!

Increasing numbers of people now have access to electronic means of communication and the editors of both the OBC Bulletin and *Forktail* would like to urge all authors that, wherever possible, they submit their papers, articles or notes by email. Articles can be added as attachments or just sent as text within an ordinary email. Either way, this greatly speeds up the process of dealing with manuscripts, sending material out to referees and dealing with revisions to papers. An added bonus is that it saves on postage costs, allowing even more money to be used for conservation work in the Orient.

All material should be sent to mail@orientalbirdclub.org

Please note that originals or high quality copies of photographs and illustrations should still be posted to the relevant editor as versions suitable for emailing are rarely satisfactory for reproduction in print.



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Guidelines for contributors

Whilst the Editor is always pleased to discuss possible contributions with potential authors, and to advise on preparation, it would be helpful if the following guidelines could be adhered to:

1. **Articles** These should be written clearly, preferably typed, on one side of the page, with all lines double-spaced, leaving wide margins, and should be no longer than 2,000 words. Scientific names should appear at the first mention of each species or, if all species appear in a table, they may be given there instead. Scientific names should, where possible, follow T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey and W. Duckworth (1996) *An annotated checklist of the birds of the Oriental Region*.

Any tables to accompany articles should be prepared on separate pieces of paper, and be thoroughly checked. Titles of tables should be self-explanatory. Diagrams should be clearly drawn, in ink, ideally 15 cm wide and 11 cm high. References should be cited in the order in which they appear during the paper in the same style used in this Bulletin.

It would be helpful if two copies of each contribution could be submitted, and also if possible the text submitted on a computer disk, ideally in Microsoft Word, in either PC or Macintosh format.

2. **From the field** These should follow the format in the current edition of the OBC Bulletin, and be sent to the Bulletin Editor, OBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK.
3. **News/Information** Typed or handwritten contributions should be sent to the Bulletin Editor, OBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK.

Although every effort is made to retain all articles in their submitted form, the Editorial Committee reserves the right to make changes that it deems necessary, and, in a minimum of cases, without prior reference to the author. It is assumed that all contributors submitting material understand and accept these conditions. All contributors, photographers and artists, in submitting material for the OBC Bulletin, also give permission for their work to be used in the OBC Internet pages.

For Around the Orient, Recently Published, Stray Feathers and Free Press, the deadline for submission of material is 15th February (May Bulletin) and 15th July (November Bulletin). The deadlines do not apply to main articles which will be published as soon as possible after acceptance by the Editorial Committee.



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